

UNRIVALLED INFLUENCE



VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.com

WOMEN AND EMPIRE IN BYZANTIUM

UNRIVALLED INFLUENCE



JUDITH HERRIN

WOMEN AND EMPIRE IN BYZANTIUM

UNRIVALLED INFLUENCE



JUDITH HERRIN

UNRIVALLED INFLUENCE



ALSO BY JUDITH HERRIN:

Authored Volumes

The Formation of Christendom

A Medieval Miscellany

Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium

Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire

Margins and Metropolis: Authority across the Byzantine Empire

Co-Edited Volumes

Iconoclasm

Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century: The Parastaseis Syntomoi

Mosaic: Byzantine and Cypriot Studies in Honour of A.H.S. Megaw

Personification in the Greek World from Antiquity to Byzantium

Identities and Allegiances in the East Mediterranean after 1204

UNRIVALLED INFLUENCE



WOMEN AND EMPIRE IN BYZANTIUM

Judith Herrin

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
PRINCETON AND OXFORD

Copyright © 2013 by Princeton University Press
Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey
08540

In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 6 Oxford Street, Woodstock,
Oxfordshire OX20 1TW

press.princeton.edu

All Rights Reserved

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Herrin, Judith.

Unrivalled influence : women and empire in Byzantium / Judith Herrin.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-691-15321-6 (alk. paper)

1. Women--Byzantine Empire--History--Middle Ages, 500--1500. 2. Women--
Byzantine Empire--Social conditions. 3. Women and religion--Byzantine Empire. 4.
Upper class women--Byzantine Empire. 5. Byzantine Empire--Social life and
customs. I. Title.

HQ1147.B98H47 2013

305.420939'8618—dc23

2012038153

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available

This book has been composed in Sabon

Printed on acid-free paper. ∞

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For

EDMEE LEVENTIS

*Warm and generous ambassador for Hellenism and Byzantium and in
loving memory of*

DINO



CONTENTS



<i>Abbreviations</i>	ix
<i>Introduction</i>	xiii
1. Women in Byzantium	1
2. In Search of Byzantine Women: Three Avenues of Approach	12
3. Women and the Faith in Icons in Early Christianity	38
4. Mothers and Daughters in the Medieval Greek World	80
5. “Femina Byzantina”: The Council in Trullo on Women	115
6. Public and Private Forms of Religious Commitment among Byzantine Women	133
7. The Imperial Feminine in Byzantium	161
8. Political Power and Christian Faith in Byzantium: The Case of Irene (Regent 780–90, Emperor 797–802)	194
9. Moving Bones: Evidence of Political Burials from Medieval Constantinople	208
10. The Many Empresses of the Byzantine Court (and All Their Attendants)	219
11. Theophano: Considerations on the Education of a Byzantine Princess	238
12. Toleration and Repression in the Byzantine Family: Gender Problems	261
13. The Icon Corner in Medieval Byzantium	281
14. Marriage: A Fundamental Element of Imperial Statecraft	302
<i>Index</i>	321

ABBREVIATIONS



- AASS: *Acta Sanctorum*
AB: *Analecta Bollandiana*
Annales ESC: *Annales: Économies Sociétés Civilisations*
B: *Byzantion*
BCH: *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*
BF: *Byzantinische Forschungen*
BMFC: *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Charters*; available online at http://www.doaks.org/publications/doaks_online_publications/typ000.html
BMGS: *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*
BS: *Byzantinoslavica*
BZ: *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*
CahCM: *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*
CFHB: *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae*
CSCO: *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*
CSHB: *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, Bonn corpus (Bonn edition and dates)
DC: Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, ed. J. J. Reiske, 2 vols. (Bonn, 1829–30); partial French trans. and comm., A Vogt, *Le livre des cérémonies*, 2 of 4 vols. (Paris 1967)
DOC: A. R. Bellinger and P. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, 3 vols. (Washington, DC, 1966–73)
DOP: *Dumbarton Oak Papers*
EHR: *English Historical Review*
GRBS: *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*
JECS: *Journal of Early Christian Studies*
JEH: *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*
JÖB: *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik* (previously *Jahrbuch der österreichischen byzantinischen Gesellschaft*)
JRS: *Journal of Roman Studies*
JTS: *Journal of Theological Studies*

- JusGR*: K. E. Zachariae von Lingenthal, *Jus Graecoromanum*, ed. I. and P. Zepos, 8 vols. (Athens, 1931; repr. Aalen, 1962)
- LP*: *Le Liber pontificalis*, text, intro., and commentary, L. Duchesne, 2 vols. (Paris, 1884–92); Bibliothèque des Ecoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 2nd ed., C. Vogel, 3 vols. (Paris, 1955–57); Eng. trans. R. Davis, *Book of the Pontiffs (Liber pontificalis to AD 715)*, *TTH* 6 (Liverpool, 1989; with 2nd and 3rd eds. 2000 and 2010); *The Lives of the Eighth-Century Popes*, *TTH* 13 (Liverpool, 1992; rev. ed. 2007); *The Lives of the Ninth-Century Popes*, *TTH* 20 (Liverpool, 1995)
- Mansi*: J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova at amplissima collectio*, 53 vols. (Florence, 1759–98; repr. Paris/Leipzig, 1901–27, and Graz, 1960)
- MGH*: *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Diplomata = Diplomata Karolinorum*, vol. 1 (Hannover, 1906); *SRG = Scriptores rerum Germanicarum*, 62 vols. (Hannover, 1871–1965); *SRL = Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et italicarum saec. VI–IX*, 7 vols. (Hannover, 1885–1920); *SS = Scriptorum*, 32 vols. (Hannover, 1826–1934) (this includes *Schriften*)
- N. Ch.*: Nicetas Choniates, *Historia*, Bonn ed. (1835); see the new Greek edition, ed. J. L. Van Dieten, *Nicetae Choniatae Historia* (Berlin/New York, 1975), and the Eng. trans., H. Magoulias, *City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates* (Detroit, 1984)
- Nikephoros*: *Nicephori opuscula historica*, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1880); Eng. trans., Cyril Mango, *Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople, Short History*, *Dumbarton Oaks Texts* 10 (Washington, DC, 1990)
- OC*: *Orientalia Christiana*
- ODB*: Alexander Kazhdan et al., eds., *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1994)
- Peira*: I. and P. Zepos, eds., *Peira of Eustathios Romaïos*, in *JusGR*, vol. IV (Athens, 1931)
- PG*: J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus, series graecolatina*, 161 vols. (Paris, 1857–94)
- PL*: J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina*, 225 vols. (Paris, 1844–64)
- REB*: *Revue des études byzantines*
- SGM*: *Syllabus Graecarum Membranarum*
- Theophanes*: *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1883–85, repr. Hildesheim, 1963, New York, 1980); Eng. trans. with intro. and comm., Cyril Mango and Roger Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284–813* (Oxford, 1997)

TM: Travaux et Mémoires

TTH: Translated Texts for Historians

ZRVI: Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta

INTRODUCTION



AT FIRST THERE WAS WOMEN'S HISTORY, then the history of gender, and now a vastly more sophisticated theory and methodology of studying historical men and women. When I first started working on women in Byzantium in 1976, there was very little research published specifically on the female half of its society. Only a few empresses, princesses, nuns, and other famous (or infamous) individuals received attention. And most of it was scurrilous, designed to illustrate their weak characters and dangerous impulses, as male authors perceived them. Yet women not only accounted for 50 percent of the population in the Byzantine Empire and, however restricted, must have influenced their male relatives, they could also be studied in their own terms. The moment I started to look for them, I found frequent records of women taking initiatives in a wide range of sources, which indicated a far greater visibility than had been assumed of women outside the imperial court, as well as within.

Forty years of researching and writing about the distinctive features of Byzantium are presented in this book and its companion volume, *Margins and Metropolis: Authority across the Byzantine Empire*. Each chapter has been lightly edited to remove the particularities of the original version, but I have not tried to rewrite them. At the same time, at my editor's suggestion I've added a personal account of how I came to write each chapter and who and what influenced me in doing so. A selection of the most important and relevant new publications are noted. Each volume traces a historian's journey across the Byzantine Empire, traveling on different but related paths. This trek began in the 1960s, at Cambridge, when I chose to become a historian, and those very radical times naturally left their influence. I still feel myself a part of that period, am proud to have contributed to its radicalism, and am happy to say that it has marked my work ever since.

Through family circumstances I grew up in a house surrounded by active women who worked, earned, and enjoyed living. So I felt an immediate affinity with the feminism of the 1960s, with its egalitarian openness to immediate experience, which was rooted in the anti-authoritarianism of the period. Feminism is a different "ism" from

Marxism, which makes a claim on history and provides an explanatory tool for its study. Feminism, especially in its early forms, was concerned with inequality, and this has influenced approaches to medieval societies where women were not only unequal but also denigrated. Undoing the prejudice of past centuries became a current need. In Byzantium, however, I found an unrivalled influence of women and evidence for it in many different fields: religious practice, legal status, shared Greek education, and political influence through the ruling dynasty. Women might even claim the imperial throne through the combined pressure of Christian monogamy, which allowed them not to remarry, and Roman law, which guaranteed their inheritance. Despite the context of an entirely patriarchal society heavily dominated by male prejudice, every century of Byzantium's existence reveals at least one empress of remarkable power and many independent women. I was privileged to be among the first to explore the new fields that were opening up—the great joy of being a pioneer. I contrast this with my experience of Marxism in the Introduction to my companion volume, *Margins and Metropolis across the Byzantine Empire*.

Another explorer trying to fill this black hole in Byzantine Studies was Angeliki Laiou, who presented a plenary paper on women at the International Congress held in 1981 in Vienna. It was accompanied by a number of short communications mainly devoted to collecting references. More useful for the study of women was Cyril Mango's plenary paper on "Daily Life in Byzantium," which emphasized the significance of archaeological data. Although I could not attend the Congress, I realized from the publications that it had advanced the study of women. Unfortunately, it proved difficult to harness this movement in a collaborative fashion. In a fulsome review of Laiou's important book on *Peasant Society*, I had pointed to the fact that walnut or hazelnut production could keep a peasant family for years. By failing to separate nut from fruit trees in her computerized investigation, this economic marker had been overlooked. Although I made clear how much I admired the path-breaking work that went into her study made in the era before computers, she took offense at this critical remark and was a bit brusque at our subsequent meetings. Only decades later when she came to give the Runciman Lecture at King's College London, at my suggestion, could we discuss our shared interests.

As a feminist engaged in the women's movement of the 1960s I had a thoroughly antagonistic attitude toward the male depreciation of "the weaker sex," a slur commonly found in medieval records. My instinctive reading of Byzantine documents was suspicious and wary. But I identified ways of getting around the prejudice of male authors,

which I laid out in a seminar paper in 1980, “In Search of Byzantine Women: Three Avenues of Approach,” [chapter 2](#) in this volume. Postmodernism and the “Linguistic Turn” took this problem into high-flown theory by dissolving any connection between the female figures constructed by male authors according to literary narratives and actual women. Liz Clark’s articles “The Construction of Women” (1994) and “The Lady Vanishes” (1998) famously applied this theory to early Christian women like Macrina, the sister of Gregory of Nyssa, and concluded that his representation of Macrina owed more to his own preoccupations, both familial and theological, than to any real woman. Yet despite announcing the lady’s disappearance, Clark admitted that Macrina “has left traces and lives on imbedded in a larger socio-linguistic framework.”¹

I also identified such opposition when women stepped outside the framework to take initiatives. In the case of Macrina, Gregory reported that she chose to reject marriage for virginity (and at a relatively young age), and thus rose above the normal constraints of womanhood, to surpass them in a way that was not womanly. This is the other common trope of women who become like men, manly in their courage, dedication, and exceptional devotion to the faith. Yet Macrina made a certain choice in refusing to marry, which allowed her to create her own domestic religious environment within the family home, employing inherited wealth. What Gregory chose to report about her may say more about him and his concerns than hers. But we can discern her decision through the veil of his prejudice. A similar case can be made for the other Gregory, Gregory of Nazianzos, whose construction of his sister Gorgonia may be modeled on their mother, Nonna.² While many Late Antique texts apparently about women turn out to be ways men found to compete with each other,³ they sometimes let slip instances of those women voicing opposition. In 1994 Clark drew attention to these “counterhegemonic discourses” by which women created “small openings for their own projects and expressions of value” and thus “subverted the Church Fathers’ patristic ideology from within.”⁴ Analyzing these slips, often asides and throw-away remarks not essential to the narrative helped me to write the history of three astonishing Byzantine empresses in *Women in Purple*.

My study of Byzantine gender was further enriched by the existence of eunuchs, castrated males, in prominent social positions. Whether they served in the court hierarchy, in the church, or in wealthy households, or were foreigners enslaved and castrated beyond the empire or raised as eunuchs by Byzantine families, their presence created an in-between gender, neither male nor female. Their prominence in ceremonial activities made them guardians of some of the unwritten court traditions, an activity paralleled on the female

side by young women employed as ladies-in-waiting to the empress. Recently, attention has been drawn to the possibility of envisaging female as well as male eunuchs, and there is no doubt that the importance of eunuchs in Byzantium adds another layer of complexity to the analysis of gender.

In my brief history *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire*, I regularly note the exception influence of women. Compared to their known roles in the classical Roman period, lowly status in early medieval Europe and subordinate position in the Islamic societies that became established in the seventh century, women exercised an unusual influence in Byzantium. This can be traced in the prominence of many empresses and elite women who left their mark, their contributions to ceremonial, their economic activity traceable in wills and legal cases, and their written legacy, demonstrating the quality of their education. Beyond the ruling circles, my search for Byzantine women led me to re-read many texts and to analyze the forces, normally controlled by men, that shaped their world. The Byzantine church provided a large repertoire of prejudices as well as appreciations. Women were to avoid the sin of the first mother (Eve) and emulate the ever-virgin Mother of God, Mary. But since no normal woman could measure up to the positive role model of the latter, many were almost automatically assumed by men to belong to the condemned state of the former. They were treated as essentially liable to slide from the royal road of virtue, or worse, were simply considered prostitutes. Against these constructed stereotypes, the statements made by women in legal documents such as wills, court records, and other first-person quotations seemed more likely to reflect their actual concerns and intentions.

From my first effort to understand the specific role of women in the reproduction of the originally pagan tradition of icon veneration in 1983, I continued to explore this remarkable aspect of Byzantium. Since men also venerated holy images, it was a shared element of religious observance. But I argued that it might have been more meaningful to women, who had no official position within the church, apart from the role of deaconess or widow, which died out after Late Antiquity. They might assist as doorkeepers and lamplighters but had no liturgical function. Where Byzantine authors (male) found female devotion to icons a confirmation of women's inadequate intellectual grasp of theology and corresponding reliance on visual aids, I posited an element of reception theory that suggested their structural response to painted portraits of holy people. Rather than attributing this attention to weakness, I interpreted it as empowering. Within the private space created in front of the holy image, women could express their belief in an unmediated, direct engagement under their own

control, in which their own words and thoughts could predominate. This was generally a domestic and private veneration of Christian images.

In this work the group of feminist historians who met at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands to study “Women in the Christian Tradition from Late Antiquity to the Reformation” proved immensely stimulating. Peter Hatlie, then teaching at the university, ensured that the East Christian world was fully represented. With funding from the European Science Foundation (ESF), discussions on the public/private divide, the theories of Mary Douglas, and their development by Ross Kraemer informed our research. Numerous examples of women acting alone, or with their husbands and children, demonstrated their individual responsibilities and achievements. Although they are often not identified by name, it’s clear that mothers raised their children, produced goods for sale in markets, and had a certain influence even as anonymous individuals. During the iconoclast persecution of the eighth and ninth centuries, some women clung to their icons and men acknowledged their support in resisting imperial policy. By examining the origins of the icon corner, I traced the feminine role in maintaining the protection of the hearth, which passed from ancient gods to icons of Christian figures, both venerated as household protectors and guarantors of safety.

Female concern with religion went much further than icons. Women committed themselves to the ecclesiastical life (as nuns and dedicated virgins) and helped to shape it as patrons of monasteries. Thanks to an invitation from Kari Børresen, I was able to participate in her ESF project, *Gender and Religion*, followed by the encyclopedic undertaking, *The Bible and Women*, currently being published in four languages, with more comparative work and meetings in Oslo, Rome, and Florence. We used these meetings to discuss a wide range of issues, including the role of queens and empresses, the powers assumed by mothers in families (which may have become most notable when they were widowed), and women’s use of the legal system for support in the case of separation and divorce. Within the family the mother often emerged as the most important person, directing the children’s education and arranging their marriages. In the case of Byzantine empresses the activities of their Late Antique predecessors seem to have established a framework that I characterized as “The Imperial Feminine in Byzantium,” [chapter 7](#) in this volume. In *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium*, I extended this into the eighth and ninth century when empresses played a significant role in the defeat of iconoclasm. Once widowed Irene and Theodora abandoned their husbands’ policy, changed the patriarch to ensure ecclesiastical support, and restored religious

images to their hallowed place. Whatever the impetus behind these daring reversals, the “Triumph of Orthodoxy” is forever associated with them.

In addition to their relationship with the established church it was interesting to compare Byzantine and Western medieval women’s attitudes to secular education. Basic literacy seems to have been higher in the East than the West, and some women were clearly educated to a high standard in classical Greek thought. While Anna Komnene is the most outstanding example, other less imperial women also mastered classical Greek and composed poems and hymns. Among Byzantine princesses who were sent abroad in diplomatic alliances designed to sustain the empire’s policy toward foreign powers, it’s possible to examine their education and preparation for this role. Theophano was not “born in the purple,” but she succeeded in spreading an awareness of Byzantine culture in Western Europe, which was later resented. In this way, teenage girls often performed a heavy ambassadorial function, which was part of the empire’s use of marriage as a diplomatic tool.

These essays range from the third to the fifteenth centuries. In putting them together and adding to them for this volume I have sought to achieve three things. For historians of other periods and societies, and for those interested in the historical potential of issues of gender, I have put in place a rough mosaic of the range of issues where Byzantine studies can add to our overall understanding. Much of this evidence is anecdotal and requires closer analysis of the source material dominated by male authors and the constraints of genre. Second, for those interested in Byzantium itself, I hope to draw attention to a wide range of little-known source material, which deserves further investigation. Third, by setting out this exploration I want to lay down a challenge to historians for whom comparison should be a basic requirement: *why* did Byzantium offer such exceptional opportunities for women?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the writing and preparation for republication of these essays I want to thank many who have supported my work: the A. G. Leventis Foundation, the Hellenic Foundation and the Michael Marks Charitable Trust; Anthony Barnett (a feminist before the arrival of Feminism), Alexandros Kedros, Edmée Leventis, Marina Marks, and Rick Trainor, the Principal of King’s College London; and my colleagues in the departments of Classics, Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, and History at King’s.

This collection is a companion to *Margins and Metropolis: Authority across the Byzantine Empire*. New bibliography in both volumes is signaled in the notes by **Update**. In preparing the text, I thank Andreia Carvalho and Rupert Smith for their skill in scanning and editing the originals and entering Greek text, and Alessandra Bucossi and Alex Rodrigues for introducing me to the wonders of Endnote. It is also a pleasure to recall how Maria Hatjigeorgiou first proposed this volume and collected the material. I am grateful to the Dumbarton Oaks Museum (Washington, DC), the British Museum (London), the Bode Museum (Berlin), the University of Michigan, and the Holy Orthodox Monastery of St. John the Theologian on Patmos (Greece) for permission to reproduce their photographs, and I thank Larissa Klein for her help in putting them together. Jennifer Harris's careful copyediting and Heather Roberts's attentive indexing saved me from many inconsistencies and non sequiturs. Above all I'm most grateful to Brigitta van Rheinberg for her enthusiastic acceptance of the idea of these volumes and her skill in steering them through the Press.

NOTES

1. Elizabeth Clark, "The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the Linguistic Turn," *Church History* 67, no. 1 (1998), 1–31.
2. Ray Van Dam, *Families and Friends in Late Roman Cappadocia* (Philadelphia, 2003) 87–96.
3. Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA/London, 1996).
4. Elizabeth Clark, "Ideology, History and Gender: The Construction of 'Woman' in Late Ancient Christianity," *J ECS* 2 (1994), 155–84, esp. 183; cf. eadem, "Rewriting the History of Early Christianity," in C. Straw and R. Lim, eds., *The Past before Us: The Challenge of Historiographies of Late Antiquity* (Turnhout, 2004), 61–68; and the modifications suggested by Anthony Kaldellis, "The Study of Women and Children: Methodological Challenges and New Directions," in *The Byzantine World*, ed. Paul Stephenson (London/New York 2010), 61–71.

UNRIVALLED INFLUENCE



1

WOMEN IN BYZANTIUM



This 2009 lecture titled “We Are All Children of Byzantium” was designed to introduce a particular feature of Byzantine culture at the 19th Annual Runciman Lecture, a series set up by Nicholas Egon at King’s College London in honor of Sir Steven Runciman. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Matti and Nicholas for their generous support of it. The title was taken from a speech given by Jacques Chirac in Marseille in 2004, which attracted my attention. Happy the country, I thought, whose political leader can make the claim: “We are all children of Byzantium.” France has always had a memory of Byzantium, perhaps because some of its medieval representatives ruled in Constantinople for over 50 years, but also because Louis XIV was determined to elevate his court to a dominant position in French society, and therefore looked back to the ceremonies and ritual movements of the imperial Byzantine court. Today we can trace the shadow of Constantinopolitan practice behind the official proceedings of eighteenth-century Versailles. Under the Sun King’s patronage the first systematic edition and translation of medieval Greek histories was undertaken and the first dictionary of Byzantine Greek produced.

These early studies ignored women unless they caught the attention of chroniclers, usually for inappropriate behavior. Restoring Byzantine women to a level of serious study has proved taxing, and the process may never be complete due to the paucity of evidence. But the struggle to reclaim their contributions to the empire throughout its long history is producing striking results, which are surveyed in a general manner in this chapter. It is published here for the first time and I make no apology for a certain repetition—to combat the misogyny of so many centuries some insistence may be necessary.

THE RUNCIMAN LECTURE was established at King’s College London in 1991 by Nicholas Egon in honor of the historian Sir Steven Runciman. It regularly attracts a large mixed audience, from ambassadors to school-children. On 5 February 2009, when I was honored to give the lecture, a novel element was added by the presence of Boris Johnson, the new mayor of London. A classicist by training, who attributes his blond hair if not his sense of humor to Ottoman genes, he enjoys the second largest direct vote in Europe after the president of France. He’s also responsible for patronizing a scheme, based at King’s, to get Latin taught in the capital’s primary schools.

At the end of my illustrated lecture, “We Are All Children of

Byzantium,” he asked a challenging question about the prominence of women in the Byzantine Empire. This was sparked by my emphasis on the significant actions of imperial women, from Galla Placidia, whose fifth-century mausoleum in Ravenna continues to attract crowds of tourists, to Maria/Marta of Georgia, who married Emperor Michael VII in the eleventh century. How did they sustain this high profile, he asked, was there a structural reason?

I believe there is. It lies in the gendered character of the imperial court in Constantinople, which brought into focus a set of forces from Roman law to Greek education and Christian monogamy that permitted the quite exceptional, continuous influence of women at the center of the Byzantine Empire through its 1,100 years. This was different from the ancient tradition of powerful wives and mothers like Agrippina and Cornelia, though it was encouraged by Byzantine legal practice, which gave daughters an equal claim with sons on their parents’ wealth. Even though the empire shared an overwhelmingly patriarchal culture and forms of male domination and female marginalization found in all premodern societies, women can frequently be seen to exercise power. Male historians complained of womanly influence and were too patronizing to mention any female achievements. Some even encouraged a lascivious promotion of imperial gossip. So the mayor’s challenge is clear: how was it that women so often exercised influence over the millennial empire?

First, a cursory glance at the pattern of their prominence. It began with Helena, the mother of the first Constantine, founder of the great walled capital of Byzantium, the city that bears his name, in the fourth century. She went to Jerusalem probably to quell military unrest and organized the building of churches and charitable institutions. Later it was claimed that she had identified the True Cross there. Across the fifth century, Galla Placidia, Pulcheria, Verina, and Ariadne took the stage. In the sixth, the famous Theodora, though raised to the throne from her role as a circus performer, found that as empress she could directly challenge her consort, Justinian, and his advisors. The words “Purple makes a fine shroud” were attributed to her as she inspired the emperor to crush the rebellion from which they were about to flee, and once that was achieved, she put her name to a joint building program that stretched from Sinai to Ravenna and included Hagia Sophia itself. In the seventh century Empress Martina tried to rule with her son; in the eighth when Byzantium again entered a crisis woman played a key role in its resolution. The empresses Irene in 787 and Theodora in 843 each restored the veneration of icons after the two attempts to drive graven images from the art and ritual of Eastern Christendom. Their innovation and determination established models for later women: the empress-regents Zoe

Karbonopsina and Theophano in the tenth; the imperial sisters Zoe and Theodora, the Georgian Maria/Marta, and Anna Dalassene, mother of Alexios I, in the eleventh; and Anna Komnene, imperial princess but never empress, in the twelfth. After the Latin interregnum of 1204–61, women regained power with Michael VIII's recapture of Constantinople, and Anna of Savoy and Helena Kantakouzene perpetuated the exercise of independent feminine influence in the last centuries of Byzantium—a continuous, glittering, and unequaled array of public female authority that can in no way be described as secretive or exercised from “behind the throne.”

How can this be explained? At its heart feminine power was based in the structure of the Byzantine court. The empress not only had her own living quarters managed by her eunuch servants, who held positions equivalent to the emperor's staff: master of ceremonies; treasurer; guardians of the wardrobe, the bedchamber, the ink pot (for signing documents), the stables, and so on. The empress's activity also created an imperial feminine version of power embedded in all aspects of court ceremonial, which gave her and her courtiers the opportunity to exercise autonomous influence. For many centuries this courtly hub of empire controlled the procedures that elevated rulers, organized their marriages, set up their liturgical calendars, choreographed their diplomatic receptions, and commemorated their deaths. Every ceremony involved men and women, sometimes separated in parallel activities, often together in male and female patterns of movement. Every emperor needed an empress (only one is known to have managed without a wife), because the empress was required to direct the female half of the ceremonial rituals that dominated court life.

At the same time elite women in the court could enjoy their own incomes from estates inherited and donated at marriage; Byzantine law protected their capacity to own and manage property. They could dispense funds in the construction of churches, monasteries, and poorhouses, and patronize poets, historians, doctors, and theologians, not least because some of them were themselves educated in the seven liberal traditions of classical Greek knowledge. They could invite individuals to dine with them in their private dining rooms and send personal messages to individuals outside the palace. Their independence could become notorious, as Theodora proved in the sixth century, when she protected a bishop condemned for heretical views within her own gynaeceum.

Part of the pleasure of giving a public lecture is the chance to speculate beyond the limits of academic scholarship. I discussed the fifth-century empress Honoria, as an example of the capacity of women educated and trained in the Byzantine court. Her mother was Galla Placidia, daughter of Emperor Theodosius I. During the sack of

Rome in 410, the young Galla was captured by Athaulf, the Gothic leader. He took her off to Gaul, where in 414 they celebrated their marriage in great style. Later Athaulf was murdered and Galla was brought back to Rome as part of a new treaty concluded between Goths and Romans. In 417 she was married to a Roman general Constantius, and they had two children: Honoria and Valentinian. And then Constantius died.

Having experienced the loss of her two husbands, Galla seems to have determined to take her fate into her own hands. She must have played a part in her five-year-old son's promotion to Caesar in 424 and assumed a major role as regent and mother of the future emperor of the West (Valentinian III ruled from 425–55). For the next 25 years she dominated the imperial court at Ravenna and doubtless inspired her own daughter, Honoria.

When Honoria was about 8 years old she was given the title Augusta. This was highly unusual. As empress she grew up with the highest authority accorded to women in the Roman world and coins were struck in her honor. Instead of marrying, however, she lived in her own palace in Ravenna and began to plot against her brother Valentinian III with her steward Eugenius. Valentinian was the junior emperor of the West. When their schemes were discovered, Eugenius was killed and Honoria was exiled probably to Constantinople and forcibly betrothed to a wealthy senator. She then conceived a daring plan to avoid marrying him by calling on none other than Attila the Hun to rescue her. She was able to do this by sending her trusted eunuch servant Hycinthus to the dreaded enemy of Rome with gold and, more important, her own ring. Attila interpreted this as a proposal of marriage and demanded that Theodosius II, the senior emperor in Constantinople, grant him "his bride" and half the Western territories, in particular Gaul, as her "dowry." He then set out to make good his claim.

The threat was real enough; in 451 and again in 452 Attila advanced against Rome. On both occasions he was held off. Only his unexpected death in 453 released the Western empire from the Hunnic threat. While this story is well known, Honoria's part in it is frequently underestimated. Her upbringing had familiarized her with the Goths and other barbarian forces threatening the empire, such as the Huns. During the 440s she must have known how effectively Attila had obtained gold subsidies from the imperial government to prevent his devastating military campaigns. She had experienced the ways of the court of Theodosius II, her cousin, both as a child and as an exile, and she had the education, imagination, and resources to put her plan into operation. It would have been dangerous for Honoria to write Attila a letter, but we can be sure that she could have done so and in

Attila's eyes it would have carried imperial authority. In the event, her ring provided sufficient legitimacy for Attila to exploit it as a claim on the empire itself.

Sadly, no one bothered to recount Honoria's fate after the sudden death of Attila, which is why we can't be sure of her story. This is true of many empresses who left little impression in the written sources. But others followed in the footsteps of Galla and her daughter and took initiatives to sustain their influence, particularly after the death of their husbands. And empress-mothers like Anna Dalassena in the late eleventh century, or Anna of Savoy in the fourteenth, for example, remained a force to be feared.

Nor did this influence merely reside at the summit. Within ruling circles, female ability to conduct negotiations, to manipulate the different factions within the court, and to influence diplomacy was well recognized. In all such activities, castrated male servants in the tradition of Hycinthus assisted imperial women. Their presence in the court was ensured through a ranked hierarchy of "unbearded men" with specific titles and costumes, ranging from the young page up to the major domo in charge of court ceremonial. It was assumed that they could be trusted to guard the women's quarters and would not constitute a threat to the ruler, a feature of courtly society shared with ancient Persia and medieval China. It was later adopted by the Ottomans to ensure control of the Sultan's harem. In Byzantium, however, the existence of this "third sex" allowed women greater privacy from bearded men, facilitated their contact with the world outside the court as well as power battles within it. Eunuch servants were often educated; they could assist in recording and delivering private letters and could undertake the basic education of young princes and princesses. The continuity of instruction in the ancient Greek classics, starting with Homer and progressing through the dramatists, historians, and philosophers, meant that some imperial women were exceptionally well educated and were determined to ensure a similar training for their children of both sexes.

In addition to this structured feature of court life, Byzantine women benefited from the principle of Roman law that all children should inherit equally from their parents. Not only could they insist upon their fair share of property and income, but they also went to court to claim it and to accuse their husbands of squandering their dowries. Byzantine men gained control of the dowry at marriage but were obliged to maintain it, so that if they died first it could be returned to the widow for the rest of her life. In the sixth century the compendium of Civil Law, which enshrined these Roman rights, was compiled on Justinian's orders, translated into Greek, and then regularly updated. It is common to find accounts of women in legal records. In an

eleventh-century tax register from Thebes, the widow Sophronia was a landowner of sufficient prominence that her son-in-law, Michael, was twice identified by his relationship with her.¹ In the early thirteenth century, in a court case from Byzantine Sicily, an heiress claimed that her husband had sold the fields that constituted her own dowry and demanded compensation. In this way, even though the testimony of a woman was not held to be acceptable or reliable, Byzantine women regularly appeared in courtrooms and were recorded in legal documents reinforcing their rights.

While the best-known examples of their influence stem from proximity to the emperor, the empresses themselves often came from obscure backgrounds. From the late eighth to the late ninth century, they were sometimes selected by a so-called bride show. Suitable young ladies from provincial families competed to impress the prince (and his parents) in the hope of marrying the future emperor. After the fashion of Paris, he was then invited to offer a golden apple of betrothal to the most beautiful. The choice was hardly determined by appearances; the court used the technique to cast a wider net in the selection process in order to renew the dynasty. The notion of a “bride show” legitimized the selection of a provincial girl when this suited imperial needs. These events served an important function in binding ambitious families throughout the empire into a closer relationship with the court. Even though only one girl could be chosen for the highest role of empress, parents from all regions aspired to see their own daughter so promoted. And indeed, the benefits of such rapid upward mobility were great: when Maria of Amnia triumphed in the contest, her sisters made good marriages, her parents were housed in a grand palace in the capital, entertained at court, and given lavish presents.

In 769 a young woman called Irene was summoned from Greece to Constantinople to marry the son of Emperor Constantine V. No historian of Byzantium records why she was so favored, but her family may have served an important role within the hinge region between Rome and the Dardanelles. When she arrived in the capital, the populace greeted her as their future empress. In due course her husband became emperor and she ruled with him for five years, and then he died. Their young son Constantine was only ten years old and could not assume his imperial duties for some time. So Irene, the widowed empress, took a leading role in the Regency Council set up to ensure his inheritance, and summoned the council that reversed the policy of iconoclasm. Once he came of age, however, she did not want to give up her power. Eventually, after a series of military quarrels, Irene emerged supreme. She ordered that her own son should be blinded in order to disqualify him as emperor, and proceeded to rule

alone for a further five years, twice signing surviving legislation as emperor (only the emperor could issue laws). This is the most extreme example of the feminine exercise of power in Byzantium. While male authors disapproved of it, later empresses could and did aspire to her example of direct rule.

Nonetheless, imperial women were more likely to realize their claims via marriage. Even when the Macedonian dynasty produced only daughters, Zoe and Theodora, they were not able to sustain their rule in the same way as Elizabeth I of England. By marrying, they passed on imperial power to their husbands. But compared to their Persian and Islamic neighbors, Byzantine empresses benefited from the Christian emphasis on monogamy, on marriage as a union until death, that encouraged widows to refuse a second marriage and to extend their control of imperial power. It also placed additional stress on the dynastic family in which the wife of the ruler guaranteed the legitimacy of the imperial heir and the transfer of authority. Although military leaders regularly tried to usurp the position of emperor, and many succeeded, from the seventh century onward a concentrated focus on the idea of dynastic rule elevated the standing of the imperial family. This created greater stability through the peaceful transmission of power from father to son (five generations in the family of Herakleios in the seventh century, four in the dynasty of Leo III in the eighth, five again in the family of Basil I the “Macedonian,” and four following the coup d’état of Alexios Komnenos in the twelfth). Within this dynastic process notable women could wield extraordinary power, usually on behalf of their minor sons but occasionally for their own pleasure.

One intriguing example reveals the significance of dynastic connections in Byzantium. In 821 a military general, Michael of Amorion, seized power and determined to pass his imperial authority to his young son. As his wife had already died he sought another consort who would enhance his position. This led him to select a nun, Euphrosyne. Her mother was Maria of Amnia, which meant that Euphrosyne was the granddaughter of Empress Irene, who had restored the veneration of icons. She had been born in the purple birthing chamber within the palace and was therefore identified as a princess “born in the purple.” When her mother was exiled from Constantinople in 794, after a highly disputed divorce, Euphrosyne accompanied her into a nunnery. She had spent nearly twenty years there when the call came. But as the last living descendant of the ruling family of Leo III, she had imperial blood, and Michael insisted that she return to the capital to reinforce his status.² They were duly married. Then, as the experienced “purple-born” stepmother to Prince Theophilos, Euphrosyne arranged his marriage, through a bride show,

and groomed and supervised his young wife. Unlike most emperors of the ninth century Michael of Amorion died peacefully in his bed and Theophilos succeeded him without dissent. But when he died young Euphrosyne's choice inherited his power as regent. It turned out that she had selected and trained the most famous iconophile (icon-lover) of them all, Empress Theodora, now celebrated as the saint who instituted the final "Triumph of Orthodoxy."

These examples are exceptions to the rule of men in Byzantium. At the same time their frequency points to a continuous culture that empowered women. Thus the court always trained imperial princesses to enhance their potential to seal a diplomatic alliance. If married to a foreign ruler they would be accompanied by large numbers of Byzantine courtiers, diplomats, Orthodox priests, and ladies-in-waiting, bearing gifts of imperial silk, luxury objects of ivory, jewelery, icons, liturgical silver, and sacks of gold coin. Despite their young age, they were expected to act as ambassadors for Byzantium, carrying imperial standards of living and education to their foreign destination.

From the viewpoint of Constantinople such women performed an invaluable diplomatic service. When Anna, the sister of Basil II, was betrothed to Vladimir, the Russian prince of Kiev, she is said to have wept at the prospect. Her future husband was not even a Christian, although his conversion and that of his entire people was required for the marriage to take place. He built her a great palace of stone, as well as a stone church, most unusual in late tenth-century Russia, and she patronized the expansion of the Orthodox faith, through the construction of monasteries and the painting of icons, assisted by a large Byzantine retinue that included the future archbishop of Kiev. In legendary accounts the marriage of Anna and Vladimir produced Boris and Gleb, the patron saints of Russia. More credibly, they were also the parents of Theophana, who was trained like her mother to carry Christian and imperial traditions north when she was sent to marry the ruler of Novgorod. This pattern of sending women out of their family homes to make a new life among un-Christian people served an important diplomatic function. In Anna's case she performed the task with considerable success, marked by the rapid extension of Orthodox belief north to Novgorod, east through the Caucasus, and west into Belarus and central Europe.

Even after 1453 the last descendants of the Palaiologos dynasty married their daughters as advantageously as possible. In this way young Sophia, daughter of the last despot of the Morea, was sent off to Moscow to marry Tsar Ivan III and thus passed to their son Ivan IV, "the Terrible," a sense of his Byzantine inheritance. The myth of Moscow, the third Rome, was transmitted in part through a princess

who carried a millennium of imperial traditions with her.

Marriages designed to perform the same sort of function are also recorded in the medieval West. But the pattern of alliance was not as stable or as long-lasting as in Byzantium. First, its court at Constantinople was a fixed point in the diplomatic world of the Middle Ages: its ceremonies, banquets, and processions were made famous by accounts of visitors like Liutprand of Cremona. For seven centuries it maintained a reliable 24-carat gold coinage and was the source of luxury gifts unavailable in the West. A bride who came from such a court brought with her the trappings of a celebrated center of culture—Greek-speaking, with deep roots in both ancient pagan and early Christian literature. Second, such princesses were educated for their ambassadorial role in a systematic fashion, so that they could make the most eloquent impact in the country to which they were sent. Not all of them were “born in the purple” daughters of ruling empresses and emperors, but they were all well prepared to play an imperial role. While medieval rulers outside Byzantium regularly sent embassies to negotiate such marriages, the emperors in Constantinople regularly refused their requests.

In addition to female ambassadors, the long history of Byzantium reveals numerous talented women who remained within the empire and enhanced its cultural life, commissioning poems and histories in the vernacular Greek language; patronizing the building of monasteries and churches and the painting of icons and sponsoring holy men. They have their equivalents in other medieval societies. Hildegard of Bingen and Christine de Pisan may be superior to woman writers of medieval Greek. But the range of Byzantine activities is perhaps broader, their social prominence is more marked, and their impact on their male relatives may have been tougher. They also form an unbroken record from the fourth to the fifteenth century. Runciman may even have got it right when he mused: “I wonder if it was the strength of Byzantine women that kept the empire going so long.”

Why don't we know more about the achievement of Byzantine women, even now in the age of gender studies? Part of the reason for its neglect lies in the traditional obsession with the Greeks and the Romans that made Boris Johnson a classicist. The focus on the ancient world as the source of all good things—pagan myths, democracy, mathematics, and science, among others—has cast a long shadow over everything that followed.³ Establishing the classical past as the base of European culture meant that what followed was seen as a dark Middle Age (*medium aevum*, which gives us the adjective medieval), a time between peaks of great achievement. Voltaire and Gibbon epitomized this condemnation of everything medieval, and characterized the

period as utterly dominated by religious superstition. An “enlightened” rejection of organized belief sharpened their attack on the darkness of medieval culture.

As a result of this unbalanced view, a European system of education was developed that exalted the ancients: the classical languages were taught and vernaculars ignored; ancient history was held up as a magnificent record of excellence and medieval history brushed aside; the Greco-Roman world was validated as the foundation of all European culture to the exclusion of anything medieval. Only Christianity was admitted as another important element, and it was the Christian traditions of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, which divided the continent, that attracted most attention. Interest in the early Christian period up to the conversion of Constantine the Great was encouraged, but the period between AD 400–1400 remained largely irrelevant. Even the great Gothic cathedrals did not command much serious historical interest for centuries after their construction. As for the Eastern Christians, the Orthodox, Copts, Syrians, St. Thomas Christians of India, or the Nestorians of China, their contribution to the broader Christian tradition was neglected.

If this could happen in a world dominated by Christian belief, it is hardly surprising that other medieval civilizations, notably Islam, rarely attracted historical attention, while the pagan world of the Vikings and northern “barbarians,” as the Russians and Scandinavians were called, barely impinged. From the sixteenth century on, throughout Europe, children, mainly male, were trained in the ancient languages of Greece and Rome, learned the epics of Homer and Virgil, studied the Parthenon of Athens as the finest building in the world, and occasionally strayed a little farther east to examine the ancient Egyptians, the pyramids, or the Hittites and their hieroglyphs. But teachers rarely allowed them to develop any interest in medieval structures, languages, or cultures. Knowledge of the entire medieval world has suffered from this neglect. A greater awareness of Byzantium, with its tradition of the imperial feminine, needs to grow as part of a much wider resuscitation of the history of the whole Mediterranean region during the Middle Ages.

NOTES

1. Leonora Neville, “Taxing Sophronia’s Son-in-Law: Representations of Women in Provincial Documents,” in *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience 800–1200*, ed. Lynda Garland (Aldershot, UK, 2006).

2. This episode forms a central chapter of my study *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium* (Princeton/London, 2001).

3. Averil Cameron has recently drawn attention to this in her article, “The

Absence of Byzantium” in *Nea Estia* (Athens, 2008), which has provoked a long series of comments.

2

IN SEARCH OF BYZANTINE WOMEN

THREE AVENUES OF APPROACH



In 1976 when the Dutch committee for feminist history invited me to talk at a conference on the activities of Byzantine women, I realized a long-standing aim to make sense of my collection of references. This first effort, which was later published in the journal *Jaarboek voor vrouwengeschiedenis* (The Yearbook of Women's History), also encouraged me to look for additional source material. At the time there was considerable interest in adding medieval women to the better known figures of the past, such as ancient Greek poets, Renaissance saints, and scholars, as well as more modern examples of female leadership, empresses, queens, painters, and composers. Today it seems extraordinary that this was a necessary first step, but few historians had ever given serious attention to these activities. The title of this chapter reflected a phase of searching for Byzantine women. In addition I considered ways of tackling the problem of almost uniformly prejudiced sources, written by men, whose opinion of women was decidedly misogynist. The work was encouraged by active participation in the women's movement of those years. It also increased my awareness of more theoretical approaches to the history of women, which developed rapidly into a new field of gender studies.

An invitation from Averil Cameron to participate in the University of London seminar in spring 1980 prompted this investigation of a methodology for the identification and study of Byzantine women. And in several respects it has been borne out—particularly my stress on the passing comments of male authors, remarks that were not directed specifically to the actions of particular women. As Joan Scott puts it: "The often silent and hidden operations of gender that are nonetheless present and defining forces in the organisation of most societies," as quoted by Liz Clark, *Church History* 70 (2001), 418. In the meetings of the European team assembled in the 1980s to discuss "Women in the Christian Tradition," these issues were explored across a range of contexts that proved invaluable for a comparative perspective. They were taken further in Liz Clark's *Journal of Early Christian Studies* in the 1990s and have inspired new generations of scholars whose work is even more adventurous. I have added references to those works that mark the most important advances.

IT IS NOW WIDELY RECOGNIZED that the analysis of male-dominated societies should not be undertaken as if men alone counted in their histories. Women can play a significant role economically and culturally, even if it is only the exceptional individual—usually the wife of a ruler—who manifests overt political power. Female influence

is doubly veiled from us: it is often silent, unvoiced by the women themselves, and frequently ignored, either deliberately or as a matter of course in the sources written by men. A full theory of the potential role of women in large preindustrial societies will require evidence drawn from many in such a fashion that systematic comparisons can be made. The nature of the source material means that this will have to be a collective effort, mounted on the basis of different specialist contributions. Here I will examine some of the roles of women in early medieval Byzantine society—hopefully in a manner that will make contrasts with other social formations a future possibility.

Obviously, any search for Byzantine women must take account of the fact that they lived in a military society where men inevitably exercised power. Their political influence was therefore limited, and I shall not pursue the case of those unusual women who managed to overcome obstacles and prejudice to attain prominence. Although the case of Empress Theodora is well known, it is also highly eccentric: after all, Justinian first noticed her in a popular entertainment connected with the Hippodrome, and in order to marry her regulations preventing actresses from marrying into the senatorial class had to be changed.¹ It would be quite wrong to conclude that many made this extraordinary move from the lowest into the ruling circles of the empire. Theodora remains an exception. Yet many a modern historian has been seduced by the “grandes dames et belles dames” of Byzantium in a way that is both misleading and deceptive for any study of women in general.²

So I propose to follow three particular avenues of approach, devised as a means of identifying the positions, activity, and authority of women in Byzantine society. The first is to pick up chance references to female activity in the sources written by men, especially those that occur spontaneously in narratives unconnected with women, incidental remarks and stray observations. The second seeks to document the ingenuity with which women exercised their limited legal rights and is therefore dependent upon the case law that survives—the *Peira* (Teaching) of Eustathios Romaïos is the outstanding example. The third approach attempts to outline the significance of ecclesiastical institutions and Christian beliefs for women, an area in which female subjectivity is perhaps most closely revealed. The overall aim of these avenues is to illuminate a practical reality rather than a legal ideal. Women’s status and rights were clearly defined in the Code of Justinian and revised, restricted, and elaborated in a series of subsequent rulings.³ But these do not necessarily indicate what women actually did or thought they could do. Of course, the evidence for the period ca. 600 to ca. 1100 is scrappy and inconclusive, but it can yield results that bring us into contact with

some of the realities of female existence.⁴

Almost none of the materials basic to a study of women survive: no parish church archives of births, deaths, and marriages; few landholding records; and hardly any personal documents. And the character of those chronicles, saints' lives, and legal records that have been preserved severely limits their usefulness for a study of the female half of the population. They all share that element of bias inherent in male authors who note the most outrageous, miraculous, and in other ways unexpected aspects of female life, rather than its regular achievements and routines. These sources make it relatively easier to document women with unusual wealth and members of the imperial families than the great majority of females. In particular, they provide extremely little evidence for rural Byzantium, where the greater part of the medieval population lived and worked. Hagiographic texts and monastic documents shed some light, but we shall probably never be able to reconstruct the lives of the poorest country men and women. Those who have made their mark on the historical records of the countryside are probably untypical and correspond to a very small fraction of the total. They are women who can utilize written documents, recording their bequests and defending their property, participating in the life of the church, and attending to their children's education. Clearly, these are not the wives and daughters of illiterate subsistence farmers; some are familiar with monastic life, others with urban institutions, and most are aware that they have certain rights. Below this level, however, it is almost impossible to tabulate and measure female activities.

Urban women can be glimpsed more frequently through city-based records, and the poor are better represented here than their rural counterparts. They feature among the crowds who enjoyed races in the Hippodrome and the processions associated with court ceremonies and church feasts; they witnessed public executions, shared in charitable distributions of food, and participated in rioting and looting. Women were allegedly foremost in the protest against the removal of the Christ icon from the Chalke Gate of the palace in 726, and several maintained their devotion to icons through the two periods of iconoclast persecution.⁵ This greater visibility of city women, especially those of the capital, reflects the dominance of urban life in Byzantium. Although the complex forms of the Late Antique *polis* were drastically shaken by seventh- and eighth-century economic decline and insecurity, the ideal of city life was not lost. The traditional wealth and variety of facilities and institutions continued to act as a magnet for the countryside, drawing people to the hospitals and healing shrines, to charitable services, schools, government positions, markets and long-distance trade, employment in noble

households, public buildings and places of entertainment—in short to all the sights and wonders of civic centers. Constantinople was the sole megalopolis that maintained these and other possibilities, but even provincial capitals, ports, and smaller towns held markets and fairs and could provide opportunities for urban occupations. Because the Byzantines considered it a more desirable and advanced form of social existence, urban dwelling continued to dominate, and the records reflect this situation. City inhabitants are much better documented than the rural population.

The survival of ancient traditions of city life perpetuated public institutions and habits that influenced female behavior in the early Byzantine period despite the disapproval of the church. Thus attendance at the races, pantomimes and other forms of entertainment, and particularly visits to the baths were regularly condemned by ecclesiastics to no avail. Paradoxically, the classical pattern of segregation, which effectively kept women apart from men other than their immediate family, also created openings. For in every institution for women, such as the public bath, there had to be female attendants, and these are well documented. The development of private and domestic baths never removed the need for larger public establishments, although these were fewer and less well maintained than in ancient times.⁶ A tenth-century patrician justified his daughter's weekly trip on the grounds that her beauty was related to cleanliness, but made sure that she went out veiled and suitably chaperoned.⁷ Other public roles open to women, those of midwife and doctor, reflect the fact that it would have been improper for men to attend to feminine bodily matters.⁸ These can hardly be said to constitute a sphere of public employment comparable to that for men: women clearly did not pursue "careers." But some were involved in commercial activity, working in small businesses or running them from their homes, selling prepared food on the streets, and marketing produce grown in and around the city. Among shop-owners in tenth-century Constantinople there is evidence of two aristocratic ladies, Eudokia Hetairiotesse and Sophia, the wife of a patrician, who might possibly have employed city women in their boutiques (one appears to have been devoted to the production of garments made of goats' hair).⁹ Entertainment remained one sector open to women and one in which a certain skill could bring fame and notoriety—hardly a public career though a very public activity.

Maintaining an independent and respectable life in Byzantine cities was, however, a tough business. The church lent its weight to civilian proscriptions of behavior deemed anti-social, and urban women were certainly caught in a trap created by continuing classical urban traditions and medieval disapproval. Actresses, mimes, dancers, and

other entertainers were treated almost like prostitutes by law, indeed there can have been only a narrow dividing line between the two. So there was a serious danger for women involved in legitimate public work of being equated with these libertines, a danger exacerbated by the poverty endemic in Byzantine as in all medieval cities. Despite civic distributions of bread and ecclesiastical charity, hunger frequently forced women into prostitution. Those thus reduced to selling themselves were joined by an organized supply of young girls, purchased in the countryside and brought to the cities by pimps and procurers. Some must also have used the opportunity to take their chance of attracting an urban husband; however degrading, the established tradition of courtesans and mistresses offered a promise, if rarely fulfilled, of marriage. Throughout the Byzantine period there is evidence of a concern to redeem these women. Empress Theodora's attempt to get prostitutes into decent monastic homes was no more or less successful, one suspects, than that repeated in the eleventh century. But an element of more voluntary reform is evident from one of the miracle stories associated with the shrine of Saints Cosmas and Damian, just outside the walls of Constantinople. There, an ex-prostitute, Martha, used to sit behind a curtain fixed up at the left door of the entrance to the church and invite other poor women to resist temptation. Her own release from the madness that had induced her libertine behavior may perhaps have influenced them as they went into the shrine. But probably of greater weight was Martha's subsequent cure by the saints themselves of her "persistent headaches"; this finally allowed her to give up her daily vigil in favor of a weekly visit of thanks.¹⁰

Closely related to the institution of prostitution was that of concubinage, both feeding on the large numbers of female slaves in Byzantine cities. These women were totally dependent upon their owners and sometimes succeeded in making a lasting alliance, legalized by their freedom and marriage.¹¹ But most were quite unable to alter their servile status and were lucky if their masters arranged to marry them to other slaves and to provide for their children until they too started to work. Personal slaves were regularly freed on the death of their owner, who might also endow them with a legacy that acted as a dowry. Without a dowry their chances of making an honorable marriage were negligible. Within wealthy households female slaves worked in routine domestic jobs and also wove and sewed, frequently under the direction of their mistress, sometimes assisted by a eunuch. There is little evidence for the treatment of slaves, but Christian influence may have improved the conditions of female domestic servants.

The recognized role of eunuchs in Byzantium established this "third

sex” as men with a privileged access to women: they threatened neither the master’s authority nor the mistress’s purity. While those in the lower levels of society were often slaves or captives, the fact that a whole range of court positions was reserved for the “beardless men,” and that higher echelons in the ecclesiastical administration were theoretically held only by celibate men, meant that in many aristocratic families one son would be destined for such a career. Castration shortly after birth was the normal preparation; the operation was also performed as a method of preventing the sons of ambitious individuals from aspiring to the throne. Eunuchs dominated the personal activity of the imperial couple as wardrobe officials, chamberlains, and treasurers, and played a similar role in wealthy households. They were a regular feature of ecclesiastical institutions and city life, and seem to have formed contacts with women that would certainly have been condemned in normal men.¹² Unfortunately, it is impossible to put a figure on the number of this group of neutral men, but they were an accepted component of Byzantine society. Their relations with women are particularly visible when they filled the role of “spiritual father.” In society at large, however, their function was to reinforce the separation of the sexes and the enclosed women’s world of domesticity. Within this limited parameter a woman might organize her own household, oversee the family fortunes, and take full responsibility for the children. A poor widow who did not have sufficient money to pay the high fees demanded by doctors for a treatment of her nine-year-old son’s illness consulted the healing St. Artemios and offered to sell her sole asset, perhaps a small business that she had inherited, if only her only child could be cured.¹³ (Needless to say, the saint spurned her money and performed the cure.) But beyond this essentially domestic sphere women had few opportunities, especially if they aspired to a position of status and honor. The greater their social standing, the stronger the segregation. Only among those without the means or pretensions to grandeur could the strict separation of men and women be ignored.

Women were clearly at risk in this society, vulnerable to all kinds of slurs if they did not fulfill the prescribed roles of wife and mother. The association of women with superstitious practices, such as the wearing of amulets or incantation of magic spells in order to obtain super-natural assistance, may have been due in part to the difficulties inherent in these roles. Not all poor women could expect to get married, and among those that did the problem of poverty often remained. But in addition, the acknowledged role of women as midwives brought them into intimate contact with the mysteries, and often fatalities, of childbirth. In the absence of medical expertise, midwives regularly employed ancient customs closer to pagan

superstition than birthing folklore. The same traditional means were used when women wished to conceive sons rather than daughters, or when young girls wanted to have their chances in love predicted. Women presided over these highly personal and significant matters and were regularly condemned by both the civil and ecclesiastical authorities for perpetuating pre-Christian beliefs. Although pagan cult observance was almost extinguished by the sixth century, old habits persisted; lighting bonfires at the new moon and jumping over them was one condemned at the Council in Trullo (692).¹⁴ And through such activities considered both irreligious and antisocial in some instances, it was a short step to the connection with similar superstitions involved in the much more serious business of birth. As the chief practitioners of these arts, part astrological, part inherited medical folklore, and part outright witchcraft, women were easily associated with anti-Christian belief and heretical ritual.

A measure of the desperation felt by women when things did not work out according to the recommended path of marriage and childbearing may be gauged from several factors, for example, the frequency of infertility, a source of tremendous shame. The history of Maria as recounted by a ship's captain in the early seventh century is also revealing. It is told in the first person singular in a series of edifying moral tales collected by John Moschos.

I, the wretched one, had a husband and two children by him, the one nine years old and the other five, when my husband died and I remained a widow. A soldier lived near to me and I wanted him to take me as his wife, so I sent some friends (women) to him. But the soldier said, "I am not taking a wife who has children by another man" Then, as I learned that he did not want to take me because of the children and because I loved him, I, the wretched one, killed my two children and told him that now I did not have any. But when the soldier heard what I had done about the children, he said, "May the Lord God who lives in heaven above abide, I will not take her." And fearing that this dreadful thing should become known and I should die, I fled.¹⁵

Maria's situation is probably typical of the poor Byzantine widow, economically insecure, who craves the protection and security of marriage. Her negotiations with the soldier are conducted by other women who understand her predicament. The first proposal does not appear to be received with any sense of outrage and is rejected, formally, on the grounds of the children. The whole incident indicates the frequency of remarriage, a step condemned by the church but regularly practiced, judging by the number of legal rulings made to protect the rights of children of previous marriages. Indeed, Byzantine law stipulated that step-parents were obliged to adopt such offspring as their own, which may have been the reason for the soldier's refusal. This law is confirmed by many cases of precisely this type of adoption,

where provision of a dowry for daughters is also laid down.¹⁶ Maria, however, tried to remove the obstacle that prevented her from remarrying, and of course the point of the story as related by a clearly prejudiced male source, is that she was eventually punished for this crime. But her tale reveals the immense significance of marriage for women and the “dangers” posed by widows for men.

Marriages depended upon many factors, not least the dowry. Even between families of modest means a marriage alliance united a certain amount of property in the hands of the new couple, with contributions from both parties. As far as the bride was concerned, what became hers at marriage was normally hers to dispose of, so dowries and wills are related legal documents providing evidence of female ownership and control of wealth. This material facilitates the second avenue of approach, for it permits a fairly realistic appraisal of what individual Byzantine women with a certain amount of property could call their own. While it is true that such acts “are not the best means of self-expression,”¹⁷ neither should they be overlooked. In addition, the role of mothers and grandmothers in the arrangement of marriage contracts reveals a heavy female influence in what was a key family matter. As young girls could be married at twelve and were often abducted or illegally married below that age, their engagement in suitable alliances was sometimes undertaken early in life. Older female relatives could not be held responsible for subsequent failures: when a man tried to divorce his wife on the grounds that his grandmother had signed all the marriage documents, the court stated that her arrangements were not in question and that she did not have to appear. He, however, had to pay compensation to the bride’s family.¹⁸ An active female role in marriage contracts can also be seen in the identification of objects and property as part of a mother’s dowry, which is passed on to her daughter, thus preserving inheritance in the female line (also visible in wills).

What the bride’s family provided as her dowry largely determined the match she would make, as the groom had to contribute an equivalent value. The terms of one particular *proikosymbolion* (dowry contract) are spelled out in a South Italian document of 1097.¹⁹ The bride’s mother (probably) fulfilled her daughter Alpharana’s obligations by presenting the groom with an *antiproikion* of household equipment, including the bed complete with pillows, and her daughter with the dowry proper (*prix*, normally *proix* or *proika*), consisting of the wedding trousseau and the share in family property. On the male side, Basil, brother of the groom, John, established the three distinct parts that made up his contribution: the *progamaia dorea* (betrothal gifts) of John’s fraternal share in the family lands; the *theorettron* or *hypobolon* (bride price, there called *theorethron*) of two *modia* of land

at Kalavros, and personal gifts, clothes, shoes and jewellery. Of these, Alfarana gained full control only over her maternal inheritance and the personal gifts of her husband, though the *theorettron* was probably in her name. John's inheritance became hers only at his death, and in this sense the dowry contract must be seen rather as an insurance against poverty through bereavement than a transfer of property to a female.²⁰ A slightly later act follows exactly the same pattern, except that the groom's father stipulates a *hypobolon* of one *nomisma* (gold coin) and a *theorettron*, composed of the fourth part of his property, which he continues to hold until his death.²¹ Such arrangements for the legal transfer of wealth only after the donor's death are a regular feature of these acts and confirm the permanent nature of the alliance between families.

The young wife was thus endowed with the basic necessities of her wardrobe and household equipment, possessions that she in turn bequeathed to her own children or to any other person. Her husband administered the property established in the possession of the couple, guided by a series of legal rulings to prevent him from in any way diminishing the value of the dowry lands and goods. This legal protection meant that state officials could not expropriate a woman's dowry even for the payment of her husband's debts. There are cases where she was persuaded to give her consent to such an action, which effectively disinherited her. In many cases, however, the regular transfer of maternal inheritance from one generation to the next occurs peacefully, and in one case a widow is prevented from leaving all her property to a monastery as this will create a penniless orphan. The maternal inheritance is especially mentioned, *tois metroois autes pragmasi*, as something the girl should not be deprived of.²²

From the few surviving wills drawn up by Byzantine women one can trace the same mixture of personal effects and property that they brought to or gained at their marriage. An undated document of the eleventh century reveals the last wishes of Serika, the daughter of Mavros, from the castle of Stilo in Calabria.²³ She appears to have been childless and to have lived a lonely life since the deaths of her husband and brother. Her entire possessions, movable and unmovable, at Stilo and within the castle, she bequeathes to the lady Helen, wife of John, who also receives the sum of 20 *nomismata*, half from Serika's personal fortune and half from her late husband's. The final provision concerns her slave, Pitzoulos, who is to be freed and treated as a Byzantine citizen, *polites Romaion*. The will is written by Eustathios the priest, witnessed by several local officials, and finally Serika signs with her own hand.²⁴

A will from Tarento of 1044 goes to the other extreme in listing the detailed distribution of every item owned by Gemma, widow of

Nikèphoros, a local official and record keeper.²⁵ The main beneficiary is the church of St. Bartholomew; her nephews also gain substantial portions of her extensive property, and several servants, male and female, are given the houses in which they live, vineyards and other land, as well as personal belongings. Gemma was clearly the owner of a well-run estate, scattered with cottages and patches of vines. She also owned casks and vessels, presumably used in the making and transporting of wine; livestock; grain fields; sheep (unless the skeins of wool to be woven into curtains for the church did not come from her own sheep); and an oven. Her favorite nephew, Leo, is appointed *epitropos* (executor) of her estate and is allotted the ancestral home, half of all the scattered property not otherwise covered, a special dish (*lekanes*), and the table and two goblets that are to be used in a service of *kolybon*, the distribution of wheat to the faithful in the first week of Lent. One female slave, Risa, is given permanent ownership of the house she lives in as a legacy, as well as a vineyard.²⁶ Another is to be freed at Gemma's death and given the bed she sleeps in and four measures of grain from the next harvest. Permission to live in the cottages they inhabit until their deaths is granted to two other female servants; one of them, Oulita, also receives a chest and stool. Several pieces of furniture as well as some vines, two asses, and an unknown number of cattle are to be sold and the profits divided between the poor and the priests, or to be set aside for the salvation of this generous lady's soul. Only her clothing, jewelery, and bed linen is missing in this long list of bequests.²⁷ One of the nephews, Genesios, later decided to enter the monastery of St. Batholomew, and drew up his own will in which several of Gemma's gifts feature. They are still identifiable 40 years after her own testament in another document of 1086, which further changes Genesios's dispositions.²⁸

Clearly, both dowries and wills take on greater importance when greater quantities and values of goods are involved, and are more likely to be found in the upper echelons of Byzantine society than among the poor. But even modest families tried to give their children the basic necessities for setting up home, and women frequently wished to dispose of their shawls, woolen belts, head scarfs, and particular cooking utensils to female relatives. Among the same women who knew the use of written documents we also find an awareness of feminine rights in law and the administration of justice. It is, however, unusual to read of women taking their brothers to court, as Theodote did in 1093.²⁹ She declared: "My father, that Gannadeos, held these lands and possessed them as master and owner, and gave them to me as my dowry [*proix*]," and brought expert witnesses to support her claim, the local bishop, Mesemerios, Maleinos, the *protospatharios* (a military officer), a certain Erminnon,

and the other leaders (*archontes*) of Stilo.³⁰ Once they had declared “with one voice, speaking in truth and clearly,” that Theodote’s father had indeed bequeathed the lands at Pilikkeanos to her, the brothers’ claim to them was lost. The court ordered these to be returned to Theodote and her sister, declaring that the brothers had usurped them illegally. This female initiative may be compared with another South Italian document, in which Alfarana, widow of an imperial judge of Bari, Petrus, records his will.³¹ She takes the step of having it read out publicly, eleven years after his death, in order to confirm her position as executor (*epitropissa*) with supreme authority over her two sons, two daughters, who are to be properly dowered like their elder sister, and all the family property. Presumably the young men were now chafing at her control and needed to be reminded of her legal rights over them until they reached maturity. Petrus had stipulated that his wife was to govern everything as he did.

These two cases present examples of women of one particular Byzantine province as independent property owners, defending their claims in the law courts of Stilo and Bari against any infraction by their male relatives. A more common occurrence is the appearance of a woman accompanied by her husband or another family member. As in all medieval societies where the possession of land is a major source of wealth, family disputes over inheritance and the division of property were frequent. And although women legally had certain rights, they were rarely able to exercise them effectively. The most frequent means of avoiding quarrels while guaranteeing female control of property was for the immediate kin to give their agreement as witnesses to any alterations in family landholding. An early example is provided by the very first document in the huge archive of the Athonite monastery at Lavra, dated 14 March 897.³² In this the Tzagastes family, led by the widow Georgia, sells four separate plots of land to Euthymios, abbot of the St. Andrew monastery at Peristerai. One of these plots at Pisson east of Thessalonike, has a house, well, vineyard, and press attached; another has a mill. Georgia’s seven children concur in this sale and in the enfranchisement of a personal slave, George, who receives a legacy. Of the six sons, two are monks, and Maria, the only daughter is a nun. Two other sons add to this act their bequest to Euthymios of an enclosed vineyard with its own entrance, which they inherited from their father. This document illustrates one of the central roles for women in Byzantine society: the legitimate transference of property. As in other regions of the medieval world, east and west, women played a major part in building up and disposing of family fortunes. To analyze how great a part, one must distinguish between acts such as the one cited, where women initiate legal activity (either alone, or in the company of their

children), and those in which a woman is associated with her husband or some adult male relative.³³ The latter clearly reflect a male initiative, to which the woman's agreement is necessary.

As an example of the sort of research that must be done before one can gauge the precise degree of female independence in these matters, a brief survey of one collection of private legal documents is summarized.³⁴ Of the fifty-seven documents all dating from the eleventh century, fourteen concern women as agents (25 percent), but only six are initiated by women (10 percent). These six, reflecting the independent legal activity of women, comprise the following: one court action brought by a woman against her brothers (this is the case of Theodote described earlier);³⁵ one sale of land to a monastery by a widow;³⁶ one gift of land to a monastery made by a single woman, Yakintha, on condition that she be buried close to the church;³⁷ and three further gifts made by two widows and another single woman, also a nun.³⁸ One of the widows, a nun called Helen, donates to the monastery of the Holy Trinity, in the castle of Salerno, her family's monastic foundation complete with all its possessions, land, vines, and livestock. Her daughter Meleto, and son Eustathios, together with his wife, give their consent to this rich gift; the document is also witnessed by two of Helen's male relatives, Euthymios Agkenarisis (from her side of the family) and Nikolaos Maravilias (from her husband's side).³⁹ A more modest donation is made by the widow, Domna, who bequeaths the land she inherited from her parents to a different monastic church, for the redemption of her sins.⁴⁰ Again two male relatives are present to agree to this act, but the fact that none of them are identified by family names suggests that they may all come from a less prestigious stratum of society than the nun Helen.

From this very limited examination, it is evident that a significant number of women chose to present their property to the church at the expense of their families. The nature of the documentation deriving from monastic archives in the main clearly reinforces this impression, but it also reveals family agreement to such alienations and support for a particular motivation. Lea and her nephew, Nikolaos Portaritis, stipulate that their gift of lands is made on account of the sins of their parents and their own sins and for the salvation of their souls.⁴¹ In documents of 1012 and 1016 Glykeria gave all her property on the island of Skyros to her spiritual father, Eustratios, who was a monk and later abbot of the monastery of Lavra.⁴² The support and assistance she had received from Eustratios, especially in the trying circumstances since her husband's death, which had brought her to loggerheads with her local bishop, made him a worthy recipient in her view, but she also expected to derive considerable spiritual profit from this close association. Similarly, a childless couple who donated lands

to Lavra identified themselves as children of the monastery; thus they transformed their own sterility by becoming the offspring of a distinguished religious institution.⁴³ This assumption, certainly not restricted to women, that charitable bequests to the church furthered the spiritual progress of the donor, was widespread in Byzantine society. But it perhaps had a special appeal for those whose capacity to order and control their own lives was in reality quite limited. It seems to have been spread evenly throughout society, though our evidence naturally comes largely from the wealthier sectors who had gifts worth recording to make. There can be no doubt that propertied women could alienate their inheritance and that this is a productive field for future work relating to their economic and social roles.

The final avenue of approach to be pursued is that of the influence of Christianity on Byzantine women, for it is in the religious sphere that their subjective feelings can be most closely identified. In their Christian commitment one can get an impression of female force, and in the way this was handled by society one senses a male appreciation of something with potentially dangerous proportions. Although it is frequently assumed that early Christian monasticism was an exclusively male activity, women also shared in the movement to withdraw from the world and lead a celibate life. Like those young men who fled from arranged marriages or announced their intention of abstaining from all physical contact on their wedding night, some women saw their commitment to the faith as a superior alternative to marriage. Fewer may have been able to insist upon this negation of a regular feminine role but some succeeded and are commemorated in apocryphal and hagiographical accounts and moral tales such as those collected by John Moschos.⁴⁴ The element of transvestism that pervades this literature often distracts attention from one basic and very obvious fact: that apparel, far more than physique, identified a person. The monastic disguises adopted by women who were able to pass as eunuchs permitted them to simulate a holiness reserved by male ecclesiastical authorities to men only. To the church fathers the very idea of a holy woman was a contradiction in terms, which women could only get round by pretending to be men. Yet the existence of female martyrs gave women a model to follow. Later, the church appears to have recognized the potential of female religiosity by creating ways of channeling it into specifically feminine types of expression. It supported the establishment of convents, the devotion of young girls and widows to celibacy against the social pressures of marriage, and the practice of the spiritual marriage, whereby a couple might decide to deny their marital rights and live in a nonphysical union. These developments gave women new possibilities for expressing female sanctity within society and even within marriage,

possibilities that were quickly exploited.

The impact of Christian celibacy represents one of the most potent forces at work in Byzantine society. It escaped the church's attempt to control and direct it, producing a number of spiritual practices occasionally condemned by ecclesiastical authorities. The most excessive self-denial of certain stylite saints who lived on top of columns lay uncomfortably close to a Manichaean renunciation of the body and all material things, which in the eyes of the church led only to heresy. Similarly, as women increasingly sought an autonomous sphere in Byzantine spiritual life by founding their own monasteries, the male hierarchy of the secular church expressed concern. Since by the sixth century the sole institutional role open to women was the insignificant order of deaconesses, female houses represented a means of exercising Christian devotion in a serious and demanding fashion. Joining a religious community guaranteed a woman a greater degree of self-control than in any other spiritual practice. Therefore it is hardly surprising to find the church trying to insist that the local bishop shall have the right to enter a local convent, or that the priest who must be employed to administer the sacraments shall be appointed by some ecclesiastical authority.

Women with sufficient means to establish their own monasteries were usually able to resist such pressures and devised methods of maintaining their control as founders. St. Anthousa, for example, committed herself to the celibate life while she was still very young, making a vow to her spiritual father, who directed her religious development and instructed her as to the site of her foundation dedicated to the Virgin. It was built on an island in Lake Daphnousios some time in the mid-eighth century, that is, during a period of iconoclast persecution. Later Anthousa constructed a monastery for men on the shores of the lake—this she also ruled, and in both the tradition of venerating icons was maintained.⁴⁵ In the case of these and many other monasteries, whose history cannot be traced for more than a few generations, we seem to be dealing with a spontaneous expression of celibate practice. Unlike the imperial foundations of Constantinople and the major houses of Mount Athos, no foundation charters (*typika*) survive and so there is no evidence for their scale, organization, or administration. They were probably not equipped to accommodate large numbers or to deal with the medical needs of local people. But they created a focus for female ascetic life and attracted women to them for a whole variety of motives.

For St. Martha, for instance, the convent of the Virgin in Monemvasia was a haven to which she withdrew, probably quite early in her life. She suffered from a constant hemorrhage that must have seriously reduced her chances of leading a normal existence. From the

tenth-century description we learn that the nuns chanted the services themselves and had servants who assisted in the work of running the house. One day Martha was miraculously cured by St. John the Evangelist, who appeared to her in a vision, disguised as the priest who officiated for the nuns. He, however, was away in Thessalonike at that time, which was how Martha recognized the miraculous quality of her vision.⁴⁶

For St. Theodora of Thessalonike the existence of a local convent confirmed her determination not to remarry after the death of her husband. Instead, she sold her property, freed all her slaves except three who accompanied her into the house, gave away two-thirds of her fortune, and presented the rest to the community she joined.⁴⁷ While resisting parental pressure to marry must have been especially difficult for young heiresses, there is considerable evidence for their absolute refusal to give up the relative independence gained on becoming widows. Not all entered monasteries; some were able to devote themselves to charitable works, caring for the poor, building hospices, and endowing churches.⁴⁸ In this resistance to remarriage the church gave its support to widows, by insisting on the holy sacrament of marriage as a commitment for life. As civil wedding services were no longer recognized as valid by the ninth century, and ecclesiastical ceremonies had probably accompanied most marriages for centuries before that time, ecclesiastical authority sustained a slightly higher status for the pious widow and widower. This additional weight of canon law stressed the impropriety of second and third marriages, and indirectly assisted the independence of women bereaved and those who managed to remain single by choice.

While some couples adopted a spiritual marriage after the birth of their children and practiced a self-imposed chastity,⁴⁹ others decided to part and enter separate monastic institutions. The parents of St. Theodore of Stoudios illustrate this procedure.⁵⁰ It was probably reserved to the wealthy few who could provide for their children as well as taking part of the family inheritance with them into their respective houses. While it is not clear whether women of no means but strong convictions could gain entry, the established monasteries of the capital probably restricted their intake and expected novices to add to the foundations' resources. In contrast, the less organized rural houses, whose history is very fragmentary and discontinuous, may have been prepared to accept those women who proved themselves truly committed to the celibate life. In the case of married women who fled to monasteries to escape from their families, an eleventh-century ruling insists that they must serve a trial period of six months before taking their vows, and that their husbands must be allowed to see them before the final step is taken. If they then remain obdurate,

they must be granted their dowries, which will serve as material basis for their new celibate lives.⁵¹ This seems to confirm the suggestion that women of property would be expected by the houses they entered to bring some wealth as a condition of their acceptance.

In listing the different motivations that might lead women into monasteries, it is important not to overlook the involuntary path imposed on women convicted of adultery, prostitution, and other crimes. From the ninth century onward the traditional practice was established as law; these women should be sent to convents, where the shining example of Christian women who were there by choice might influence them for the better. They were probably forced to do the most servile tasks in the community, under strict supervision and with no prospect of release.⁵² The only improvement in their situation would presumably arise from a heartfelt conversion to the celibate life, but this is not recorded. Rather, a contrary determination to break out of what were in effect female prisons seems to have been the normal reaction of women so confined.

The ideal model of holiness, virginity, and purity and the practical life of celibate nuns are both related to particular Byzantine cults: that of the Virgin (which gradually developed from the time of the Council of Ephesos, 431) and that of icons.⁵³ Both also gained an established place in Byzantine religious life in the early seventh century, and neither was restricted to women alone. While the veneration of icons may have had a special importance for women,⁵⁴ the relationship between female religiosity and the cult of the Virgin is a problematic one. There is hardly a shred of evidence in the Gospels for the powerful authority of the Virgin; this cult was built up by theologians and (one suspects) by popular devotion to create a novel type of feminine sanctity.⁵⁵ This elevated model of total purity and virginity, holiness in a maternal guise, presented women with a new example of Christian womanhood. By imitating the Virgin, women could justify their participation in the life of the church. But the new cult also emphasized the fate of those who failed to live according to its precepts; it strengthened the ancient misogynist condemnation of woman as Eve, and forced the great majority to accept this dichotomy. Thus while a few women might succeed in breaking away from the routine life of marriage and childbearing by professing a virtuous and respected commitment to celibacy, many more would be even more downtrodden as the unalterable embodiment of disobedience, lust, and all the sins that Eve brought into the world.

While there can be no doubt as to the rapid spread of this cult and its central position in the Byzantine church by the early seventh century, the mechanism by which it grew is unclear. Three hypotheses may be considered: First, that it represented a purely theological

development related to the protracted debates over the nature, or natures of Christ. Second, that it was promoted by the exclusively male hierarchy of the church to create an acceptable model of female purity. In this case it would have been devised to fill an ecclesiastical need. Third, that it was championed by women whose institutional roles within the church were minimal and who needed an outlet and an identification for their Christian convictions. The persistent devotion of empresses from Pulcheria and Eudokia to Sophia in the late sixth century to the cult of the Virgin must have been important. In this final case, the development would represent a pressure from outside the organized structure of the church, which was incorporated as a means of channeling female piety. Probably all three contribute to the explanation of this complex process, which resulted in the institutionalization of female benefactors (otherwise excluded), while providing women with a viable means of expressing their faith and churchmen with a respectable image of feminine religiosity. However it was constructed, the cult of the Virgin became an abiding feature of the Byzantine church and one that gained special adherence among women at all levels of Byzantine society.

In pursuing this attempt to identify the influence of Byzantine women, it is necessary to emphasise the military nature of their environment, which clearly imposed wide restrictions on their activity. But unlike their counterparts in Islamic or Western Europe states, specific factors in the Byzantine context permitted certain forms of female self-expression. Inherited urban traditions, access to written documents and law courts, patterns of segregation and the influence of eunuchs, all set Byzantine women apart from their contemporaries. Even the poor who had no education and were forced to work could still participate in fairs such as that held on St. John's feastday in Ephesos or that of St. Demetrios in Thessalonike. Their situation changed in the early Byzantine period, reflecting the economic shrinkage of the seventh and eighth centuries and the subsequent expansion and prosperity of the late ninth and tenth, as well as the development of new forms of Christian institutions.⁵⁶ Politically women might have little influence, depending on their male relatives, but in cultural terms they always played an important role, not only domestically but also in the life of the church.

With these general impressions in mind, it is interesting to return to the question of those exceptional women, such as Theodora, who wielded considerable power. Nearly all of them gained such authority by marrying emperors and by becoming the mothers of imperial princes. That is, they were outsiders, not members of the ruling dynasty. In contrast, many of the princesses born to imperial parents were sacrificed to dynastic alliances that often took them away from

Byzantium and the imperial court. Neither Empress Theodora in the sixth century, or Irene in the eighth, or the second Theodora in the ninth were prepared during their childhood for the role of Augusta—they were all catapulted into it by marriage. Yet the position of imperial consort and widow commanded such respect that empresses were very rarely rejected (though Sophia, widow of Justin II, was thwarted by his successor, Tiberius II, 578–82). They may have been maligned, misinterpreted, and frequently condemned, but they were seldom deposed from positions of great influence and patronage. They regularly exercised decisive choice in the matter of the succession, by selecting another consort to share the throne in the Roman fashion of fifth-century empresses, Pulcheria and Ariadne (a similar procedure was used, incidentally, by Queen Theodolinda of the Lombards in 590), or by acting as guardian for a young son. During the early Byzantine period these undefined but generally accepted rights were tested by several ambitious and intelligent women.

Irene and the ninth-century Theodora, for instance, were both widowed in circumstances that permitted them to reign as regents for minors. Both put their portraits on the coinage, presided over important ecclesiastical councils, and retained a good deal of independence by not remarrying. Irene went so far as to dispense with her son, the senior emperor, by having him blinded—a condition that disqualified him from ruling. She then reigned alone for five years with the assistance of two eunuchs, whom she played off against each other. As sole emperor she signed her two official acts as *Basileus*, though using the feminine *Basilissa* (or *Augusta*) on her coins.⁵⁷ Theodora was not quite so ambitious. She ruled for her young son for fourteen years before being removed by her own brother. During that time, however, she had controlled the court with the aid of a trusted adviser, and she even emerged from eight years of confinement in a nunnery to resume the title of Augusta. Such positions in the imperial hierarchy were important because they involved particular ceremonies, public roles at the major events in the political and ecclesiastical life of the empire. They also commanded funds, costumes, and servants, all linked to the titles. Both Irene and Theodora (and other empresses) manifested an adroit understanding of these factors.

Even if these exceptional women had no direct influence on others, their presence and the fact that they were accepted in Byzantine society was influential. That some women could be accorded supreme powers even of life and death, that they were commemorated as rulers on coins, acclaimed in public ceremonies, and held responsible for official documents and imperial policy, made them identifiable symbols of female leadership. They were probably more visible than

their counterparts in the medieval West and the Muslim East, especially to the population of Constantinople. Throughout their society the histories of these women must have reinforced the powers accorded to widows, notably in the guardianship of children, and their relatively privileged status. Young girls from wealthy families may well have dreamt of exercising the power of an empress, perhaps by being selected in a beauty contest like the second Theodora. Despite the unlikelihood of making such a transition, the fact that imperial brides were not normally chosen from the established families at court (during this period) meant that it was a real possibility, if a remote one. Curiously, although Byzantine women were more effectively excluded from public life, shrouded in Christian roles and reduced to a very private existence during the transition from Late Antiquity to medieval Byzantium, imperial widows extended their powers after ca. 600 AD.

The empresses, however, occupied an exceptional position. The position of Byzantine women overall was manifestly subordinate. It was mainly in monastic institutions, often founded on inherited wealth and thus not very numerous, that women could exercise authority directly over men. Yet they had a discernible influence upon the religious ideology and practice of their society, and for those with means it was possible to fight for their rights, particularly as widows. A combination of factors, specific to the early medieval Byzantine empire, allowed women to break through the silence of the historical records to a remarkable degree, one not matched by their sisters in the Muslim, Jewish, and Western Christian worlds of the time. Among these factors the acceptance of female heads of state in a world overwhelmingly dominated by male authority deserves emphasis. For the fact that such exceptions were admitted perhaps demonstrates the wider extent of feminine influence—institutionalized and expressed in the ways described earlier—which was in turn reinforced by the empresses themselves.

NOTES

I should like to thank Professors Raymond Grew and Geoff Eley for their valuable comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

1. Procopius, *Secret History* IX.1–34, 47–54; X.1–18, ed. H. W. Dewing, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA/London, 1960), 102–13, 120–27; the law, *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, ed. T. Mommsen et al., 3 vols. (Berlin, 1928–29) 4, no. 23. **Update** On Theodora, see the analysis of sources excluding Procopius by Clive Foss, “The Empress Theodora,” *B* 72 (2002), 141–76; cf. Pauline Allen, “Contemporary Portrayals of the Byzantine Empress Theodora (of AD 527–48),” in *Stereotypes of Women in Power: Historical Perspectives and Revisionist Views*, ed. Barbara Garlick,

Suzanne Dixon, and Pauline Allen (NewYork/London, 1992), 93–104 (mainly on Procopius); Charles Pazdernik, “ ‘Our Most Pious Consort Given Us by God’: Dissident Reactions to the Partnership of Justinian and Theodora, AD 525–548,” *Classical Antiquity* 13, no. 2 (1994), 256–81; Leslie Brubaker, “Sex, Lies, and Textuality: The Secret History of Prokopios and the Rhetoric of Gender in Sixth-Century Byzantium,” in *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300–900*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge, UK, 2004), 83–101.

2. Charles Diehl, *Figures Byzantines*, 2 vols. (repr. Paris, 1924), is a distinguished example of such an approach and includes a study of female piety (the mother of St. Theodore of Stoudios) as well as portraits of empresses and imperial princesses. More recently, the excellent survey by Grosdidier de Matons tries to avoid this context but is forced to utilize the same limited source material in general; see J. G. de Matons, “La femme dans l’Empire byzantin,” in *Histoire mondiale de la femme*, ed. P. Grimal (Paris, 1974), vol. III, 11–43. **Update** The example of St. Theodore’s mother is now often cited as a prime example of male construction; see A. Kaldellis, “The Study of Women and Children: Methodological Challenges and New Directions,” in P. Stephenson, ed., *The Byzantine World* (New York/London, 2010), 61–71, although he suggests that it might permit a new study of mothers and sons.

3. See for example J. Beaucamp, “La situation juridique de la femme à Byzance,” *CahCM* 20 (1977), 145–76.

4. The study by A. E. Laiou, “The Role of Women in Byzantine Society,” paper presented at the 16. Internationaler Byzantinisten Kongress (Vienna 1981), *JÖB* 32, no. 1, 233–60, wisely concentrates on the later period, eleventh to fourteenth centuries, when documentary evidence becomes more abundant. The image is nonetheless dominated by high-born women of the capital. An instructive contrast is provided by the same author’s reconstruction of a peasant woman’s life: A. E. Laiou, *Peasant Society in the Late Byzantine Empire: A Social and Demographic Study* (Princeton, 1977), 294–98.

5. See Judith Herrin, “Women and the Faith in Icons in Early Christianity,” [chapter 3](#) in this volume.

6. For a seventh-century example, see the *Miracles of St. Artemios*, ed. A. I. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Varia Graeca Sacra* (St. Petersburg, 1909), no. 11, 11–12; cf. C. Mango, “Daily Life in Byzantium,” *JÖB* 32, no. 1 (1981), 79. **Update** The *Miracles of St. Artemios*, ed. and trans. V. S. Crisafulli and J. W. Nesbitt (Leiden/New York, 1997).

7. E. Kurtz, “Zwei Griechische Texte über die Heilige Theophano ...” *Mémoires de l’Académie impériale de S. Petersburg*, ser. VIII (1899), 3. I cite this aristocratic text to draw attention to what is implied rather than stated, namely, the existence of female public baths and nonaristocratic bath attendants at this date, but cf. Mango, cited earlier, 39–41.

8. Cf. *Peira* XXX.11, 79; XLIX.36 (where a bride’s virginity has to be attested in court by women). On the frequent mention of women as midwives, A. E. Laiou, “The Role of Women in Byzantine Society” (as in note 4 earlier), 245, n. 62.

9. N. Oikonomidès, “Quelques boutiques de Constantinople au XI^e siècle: prix, loyers, impositions (Cod. Patmiacus 171),” *DOP* 26 (1972), 345–46.

10. L. A. Deubner, *Kosmas und Damian: Texte und Einleitung* (Leipzig/Berlin, 1907) 128–32; Fr. trans., A.-J. Festugière, ed., *Sainte Thècle, Saints Côme et Damien, Saints Cyr et Jean: Extraits, Saint Georges: Collections grecques de miracles*. (Paris, 120–25). **Update** Deubner’s edition was reprinted (Aalen, 1980).

11. For example, the slave of Kamelavkas, a high-ranking official (*protospatharios*), whom he married and established in her own home; *Peira* IV.25.

12. On the position of eunuchs at court in the late Roman empire, see K. Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge, UK, 1978) 172–96. **Update** Shaun

Tougher, “Social Transformation, Gender Transformation? The Court Eunuch, 300–900,” in Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith, eds., *Gender in the Early Medieval World, East and West, 300–900* (Cambridge, UK, 2004), 70–82. Liz James, “Men, Women, Eunuchs: Gender, Sex and Power,” in *The Social History of Byzantium*, ed. John Haldon (Oxford, 2009), 31–50.

13. *Miracles of St. Artemios*, ed. A. I. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Varia Graeca Sacra*, no. 36, 57–59; the asset is called “oiktra pragmatidia.” **Update** Eng. trans. by V. S. Crisafulli and J. W. Nesbitt, as earlier.

14. *Mansi*, XI, col. 973, canon 65. **Update** Eng. trans. in G. Nedungatt and M. Featherstone, *The Council in Trullo Revisited*, *Kanonika* 6 (1995). H. Ohme, *Concilium Quinisextum, übersetzt und eingeleitet* (Turnhout, 2006), 60–61.

15. John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale*, ch. 76, PG, 87, col. 2929. Women feature in many of these stories, often as resilient and faithful wives and Christians; some indeed are given an almost heroic role, cf. chs. 170, 179, and 189. But there is also a sprinkling of typically misogynist comments, including one of the Sayings attributed to the Desert Fathers, ch. 217, col. 3108: “Salt is from the sea and if it gets close to water it dissolves and disappears. Similarly, the monk is from woman, and if he goes near a woman, he dissolves and ceases to be a monk.” **Update** John Moschos, *The Spiritual Meadow*, ed. J. Wortley, with intro., trans., and notes, *Cistercian Studies Series* 139 (Kalamazoo, 1992).

16. See, for instance, *Peira* XIV.16 and a rather later document of adoption from southern Italy: F. Trinchera, *SGM* (Naples, 1865), no. 177. This collection of extremely important Greek documents from southern Italian and Sicilian archives is gradually being replaced by modern critical editions by A. Guillou. While accepting the latter’s harsh judgment on the quality of Trinchera’s edition (see B 24 [1954], 6), I have been obliged to use it. Similar arrangements for adoption exist in Jewish medieval legal practice. **Update** Widows, however, were singled out for Christian charity; see “From Bread and Circuses to Soup and Salvation: The Origins of Byzantine Charity,” [chapter 13](#) in *Margins and Metropolis: Authority across the Byzantine Empire*.

17. A. E. Laiou, “The Role of Women in Byzantine Society,” 259.

18. *Peira* XVII.19 (an aristocratic marriage between families of patrician rank, in which a lot of property might have been involved). In a related case, XLIX.26, a mother breaks off her son’s betrothal because in the three years since the contracts were exchanged the bride’s family has become too poor to fulfill the terms. The children were aged nine and seven at the time of the engagement. For penalties imposed on those who married girls under 12 years old, see XLIX. 22 and 34; F. Dölger, *Corpus der griechischen Urkunden des Mittelalters und der Neueren Zeit* (Munich, 1924), III, nos. 1048, 1116, and 1167.

19. F. Trinchera, *SGM*, no. 63 (1087); unfortunately the document is not fully preserved. On marriage in Byzantine Italy, see A. Guillou, “Il matrimonio nell’Italia Bizantina nei secoli X e XI,” *Settimani di Studio* 24 (1977), 288–98. A detailed and complete contract from the eastern part of the empire is edited by T. Reinach, “Un contrat de mariage du temps de Basile le Bulgaroctone,” in *Mélanges offerts à G. Schlumberger* (Paris, 1924), 118–32. Although drawn up in Greek and corresponding quite closely to Byzantine customs, the groom is Jewish and presents a larger amount of jewelery, much of it gold, than is commonly mentioned in the more modest documents of southern Italy. It resembles tenth-century contracts from the Jewish community in Damascus published by S. Assaf, *Tarbiz* 9 (1937), 11–34 (in Hebrew), and partly translated in E. Ashtor, “Le cout de la vie dans la Syrie médiévale,” *Arabica* 8 (1961), 59–73, esp. 66–68. For a helpful analysis of the differences between Christian and Jewish customs, see S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1967–78), III, 47–159.

20. G. Robinson, ed., *The History and Cartulary of the Greek Monastery of St. Elias and St. Anastasius of Carbone*, vol. 53, OC (Rome, 1929), no. 66 (1108) records the donation made by Trotta of the land at Myromana, which she held as her *theoreton*, to Abbot Neilos of Carbone. Cf. the case of a widow taking possession of her *theoreton*, in order to sell it, A. Guillou, *Les actes grecques de S. Maria di Messina* (Palermo, 1963), no. 7. The widow, Theodote, obtains the consent of her daughter, Kale, and her brother-in-law, Theodore, in this alienation of 175 feet of vineyard, which constituted her dowry. Another document reveals a wife assigning to her husband “all my dowry” (*theoretron*) in her will; see F. Trinchera, *SGM*, no. 192.

21. F. Trinchera, *SGM*, no. 170, of 1166. Here the trousseau is listed more fully and includes a quantity of bed-linen, covers, sheets, pillows, and so on; dresses and pieces of linen; cooking equipment; three doves, one tame and two wild; and her mother’s share in the house, lands, vines and trees that she owns, excepting one holding at Tympa with a mill.

22. *Peira* XIV.22.

23. F. Nitti di Vito, *Codice Diplomatico Barese* (Bari, 1900), IV, no. 46. **Update** Among women’s wills, that established by Kale Pakouriane is extremely detailed; see the new study by Alice-Mary Talbot, in E. Malamut, ed., *Journée d’études sur les impératrices, princesses et reines du Moyen Age* (Aix-en-Provence, forthcoming 2013).

24. One of these witnesses is Nikolaos, *ekprosopo Bareos*, perhaps the “Nicola, hecprosopo Bari” known from an act of 1034; see earlier Nitti di Vito (1900), no. 23. The Byzantine title of *ek prosopou* originally designated any representative standing in for another official, but gradually took on a specific meaning. In eleventh-century southern Italy it probably indicates the chief civilian official either of a province or as in this case, of a city; see V. von Falkenhausen, *Untersuchen über die byzantinische Herrschaft in Süditalien vom 9. bis ins 11. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden, 1967) 107–8.

25. G. Robinson, ed., *The History and Cartulary of the Greek Monastery of St. Elias and St. Anastasius of Carbone*, no. 53 (1044).

26. Cf. the will of Clementza, wife of the judge, Laurentios Kaballarios of 1226, F. Trinchera, *SGM*, no. 274.

27. The dowering of freed slaves was a prerequisite for their chance of marrying; see *Peira* XLLX.6; F. Trinchera, *SGM*, no. 24 (1033). Similar provisions occur in the Jewish Geniza documents of this period; see S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, I, 145.

28. G. Robinson, ed., *The History and Cartulary of the Greek Monastery of St. Elias and St. Anastasius of Carbone*, nos. 59 (1076) and 61 (1086).

29. F. Trinchera, *SGM*, no.56.

30. Some of these witnesses belong to important local families; see V. von Falkenhausen, *Untersuchen über die byzantinische Herrschaft in Süditalien vom 9. bis ins 11. Jahrhundert*, 141. Theodote herself comes from an established background; the Gannadeos family is represented by Gregorios, recorded as *protospatharios* and judge in Mesiano, Calabria, in a case of 1095, witnessed by men from Stilo; see A. Guillou, *Les Actes grecques de S. Maria di Messina*, no. 2. Two further male relatives are active near Messina in Sicily in 1135 and 1189, see *ibid.*, no. 5, and app. II, 197–214.

31. F. Nitti di Vito, *Codice Diplomatico Barese* (Bari, 1900), IV, no. 27 (1039), in *Latin*.

32. P. Lemerle, A. Guillou, N. Svoronos, and D. Papachrysanthou, eds., *Actes de Lavra* (Paris, 1970), I, no. 1. This document was probably drawn up at the moment when Georgia decided to follow her children into the monastic world, and therefore comes very close to being a will. As the imperial monastery of St. Andrew was for men only, it was possibly to a convent attached to it or to the church of St. Nikolaos (the only other beneficiary named) that she would have retired. **Update** The subsequent twenty-one volumes of the *Archives de l’Athos* so far published (to Paris

2006) include other acts that fall into this category.

33. This problem is recognized and tackled by A. E. Laiou, "The Role of Women in Byzantine Society" (Vienna, 1981), 234, 239 (tables I and II), but with insufficient clarity. Principal donors appearing in a significant role must be separated from interested parties and cases involving women, as in Suzanne F. Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500–900* (Philadelphia, 1981), 110, table 3.

34. Again, the Trinchera collection is employed.

35. Trinchera, *SGM*, no. 56 (1093).

36. *Ibid.*, no. 33 (1042).

37. *Ibid.*, no. 51 (1089).

38. *Ibid.*, no. 29 (1034); see later on Lea and her nephew.

39. *Ibid.*, no. 49 (1086).

40. *Ibid.*, no. 46 (1063).

41. *Ibid.*, no. 29 (1034).

42. Lemerle, Guillou, Svoronos, and Papachrysanthou, eds., *Actes de Lavra*, I, nos. 16 and 20 (1012 and 1016). Taken with no. 1 (see note 29), these three acts are the only ones from the forty-eight covering the period 897–1198 initiated by women (not counting the imperial chrysobulls, which feature so prominently).

43. No. 18 (1014), cf. no. 40.

44. The experience of these women is illuminated by E. Patlagean, "L'histoire de la femme déguisée en moine et l'évolution de la sainteté féminine à Byzance," *Studi Medievali* 3 (1976), 597–623, reprinted in E. Patlagean, *Structure Sociale, Famille, Chrétienté à Byzance: IVe–XIe siècle* (London, 1981). Cf. J. Anson, "The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism," *Viator* 5 (1974), 1–32; and W. Davies, "Celtic Women in the Early Middle Ages," in A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt, eds., *Images of Women in Antiquity* (London, 1983), 145–65. A parallel case in Gaul: Gregory of Tours, *Glory of the Confessors*; Eng. trans. Ray van Dam (Liverpool, 1988), ch. 16, 30–31. **Update** Among recent studies of transvestism, see E. Castelli, "I Will Make Mary Male: Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity," in Julie Epstein and Kristina Straub, eds., *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender and Ambiguity* (London/New York, 1991), 29–49; Natalie Delierneux, "Anne-Euphémianos, l'épouse devenue eunuque: continuité et évolution d'un modèle hagiographique," *B* 72 (2002), 105–38; Stavroula Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances: Reading the Body in Byzantine Passions and Lives of Holy Women* (Uppsala, 2005), 90–126; Susan Holman, "On Phoenix and Eunuchs: Sources for Meletius the Monk's Anatomy of Gender," *J ECS* 16, no. 1 (2008), 79–101.

For systematic treatment of Byzantine eunuchs, see Kathryn M. Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago, 2003); Shaun Tougher, ed., *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond* (London, 2002); idem, "Byzantine Eunuchs: An Overview with Special Reference to Their Creation and Origin," in *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (London, 1997), 168–84; idem, "Social Transformation, Gender Transformation? The Court Eunuch," as earlier. For celibate marriage, see Anne P. Alwis, *Celibate Marriages in Late Antique and Byzantine Hagiography* (London, 2011).

45. For the *Life of Anthousa*, see now C. Mango, "St. Anthusa of Mantineon and the family of Constantine V," *Analecta Bollandiana* 100, (1982), 401–9. **Update** The Synaxarion of Constantinople *Life of Anthousa* is translated in Alice-Mary Talbot, *Byzantine Defenders of Images: Eight Saints' Lives in English Translation* (Washington, DC, 1988).

46. *Acta Sanctorum*, May V (1866), 425–27. **Update** See also *The Spiritually Beneficial Tales of Paul of Monemvasia and of Others*, ed. and trans. J. Wortley, *Cistercian Studies Series* 159 (Kalamazoo, 1996).

47. E. Kurtz, "Des Klerikers Gregorios Bericht über Leben, Wundertaten und Translation der Heiligen Theodora von Thessalonich," *Mémoires de l'Académie impériale de S. Petersburg* (St. Petersburg, 1902), ser. VIII, 6/1, 12. **Update** See Alice-Mary Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation* (Washington, DC, 1996).
48. For example, St. Anna of Levkas and the widow of St. Philaretos; see *Acta Sanctorum*, July V (1969), 486–87; M.-H. Fourmy and M. Leroy, "La Vie de St. Philarète," *B* 9 (1934), 85–167, esp. 165–67. **Update** The new edition and translation by L. Rydén, *The Life of St. Philaretos the Merciful Written by His Grandson Niketas* (Uppsala, 2002).
49. S. A. Harvey, "Women in Early Syrian Christianity," in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, ed. A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt, 288–98. **Update** See also Alwis, *Celibate Marriages*, as earlier.
50. See the funeral oration for his mother by St. Theodore, *PG*, 99, cols. 884–901. **Update** Anthony Kaldellis, *Mothers and Sons, Fathers and Daughters: The Byzantine Family of Michael Psellos* (South Bend, IN, 2006), provides an English translation with helpful introduction.
51. *Peira* XXV.4.
52. John of Ephesos cites a particularly strict nunnery at Chalcedon that was used as a prison for three noble ladies in the late sixth century. When they refused to accept the imperial definition of orthodoxy, they were shorn of their hair, dressed in black robes, and forced to do the most menial chores, even cleaning the latrines; *Ecclesiastical History* II.12. **Update** Judith Herrin, "Changing Functions of Monasteries for Women during Byzantine Iconoclasm," in *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience, 800–1200*, ed. Lynda Garland (Aldershot, UK, 2006), 1–15.
53. This is not to suggest that the cult of the Virgin was confined to Byzantium; on the contrary, its early appearance in Celtic Ireland indicates what a powerful appeal it had in regions remote from the eastern Mediterranean; see W. Davies, "Celtic Women in the Early Middle Ages," 145–65.
54. Cf. "Women and the Faith in Icons in Early Christianity," [chapter 3](#) in this volume.
55. A. Cameron, "The Cult of Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople," *JTS* 29 (1978) 79–108; A. Wenger, *L'assomption de la très Sainte Vierge dans la tradition byzantine du VI^e au Xe siècle* (Paris, 1955). The dedication of the Emperor Justin II and his wife Sophia to the cult of the Virgin represents a powerful stimulus to an already popular pressure. **Update** Among the many studies on this topic, see Maria Vassilaki, ed., *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium* (Aldershot, UK, 2005); Leslie Brubaker and Mary Cunningham, eds., *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images* (Farnham, UK, 2011).
56. The improvement in source material that becomes apparent in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries corresponds to a fundamental change in Byzantium, recognized by most historians. The "quickenning of urban life" documented by Laiou, "The Role of Women in Byzantine Society" (note 2 earlier), 241–48, is matched by an influx of Western contacts that internationalize the world of Constantinople and other major cities exposed to crusader and Norman influence. **Update** A. P. Kazhdan and Ann Wharton Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley, 1985), 167–96.
57. On the powers of empresses, see S. Mashev, "Die staatsrechtliche Stellung der byzantinischen Kaiserinnen," *BS* 27 (1966), 308–43; E. Bensammar, "La titulature de l'impératrice et sa signification: recherches sur les sources byzantines de la fin du VIII^e siècle à la fin du XII^e siècle," esp. p. 250. For their use of the coinage, see *DOC*, III, 336–37, 347–48, 452–54. **Update** Ludwig Burgmann, "Die Novelle der Kaiserin Eirene," *Fontes minores* 4 (1981), 1–36; Liz James, *Empresses and Power in Early*

Byzantium (Leicester, 2001), 111–15 on her coins, 125 on the title *basilissa*; Judith Herrin, “Political Power and Christian Faith in Byzantium: The Case of Irene (Regent 780–90, Emperor 797–802),” [chapter 8](#) in this volume. The suggestion that the legal experts simply retained the male title, *basileus*, because they could not imagine anyone but the emperor issuing laws seems convincing.

WOMEN AND THE FAITH IN ICONS IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY



This was my first attempt to account for the particular attraction of icon veneration for Byzantine women. Since it was commissioned to appear in a festschrift for Eric Hobsbawm, I also wished to highlight a subject that drew attention to female agency, an aspect of historical analysis that I felt he didn't take sufficiently seriously. Once I began to read what Byzantine men said about their womenfolk, I noticed the common dismissal of their attachment to holy images as an aspect of their weak and emotional nature: lacking a sophisticated understanding of theology, being less rational because generally less educated than men, women needed visual aids and reassurance and thus became particularly devoted to icons. Of course, iconophile men were just as devoted, but this was not the only way they could express their religiosity—they could be clerics or monks, bishops, and holy men. As priests men could celebrate the liturgy, a task never permitted to women. Only desert mothers and abbesses could exercise spiritual leadership.

So how did ordinary women relate to icons? Few tell us in their own words. Male authors inform us that some certainly appear to have expressed their faith through a personal relationship with holy people mediated through icons. Reporting these conversations, they acknowledge that the women they describe established a special contact with the saint depicted, and received messages and instructions, which brought them increased confidence and strengthened their faith and devotional practices. Many of these accounts may have been fabricated to secure the defeat of iconoclasm, in 787 and again in 843. Regardless of possible interpolations in the surviving sources and the evident bias in these accounts, women were shown to benefit from their personal contact with icons and to appreciate its direct character. Men too may have had similar experiences, but icon veneration was merely one of many practices available to them. While women may have had no other outlets, the starting point for my argument about their comparable faith was to inquire into the strength of their practices and the force of their beliefs within this sphere of apparent weakness.

Over the last three decades a huge literature has grown up around the many issues sparked by this topic. There is nothing like a great dispute, and few are greater than "iconoclasm" to spawn academic and scholarly argument. The important point to understand is that Christianity, with its beliefs, practices, and images, developed within a highly colorful world packed full of statues, frescoes, mosaics, painted objects, miniatures, and memorabilia, in all manner of artistic media. Devotees of Mithras commissioned altars on which he was shown killing a bull. Images of Isis and Osiris and many local pagan deities competed for dominance within the visual panoply. As Beat Brenk has emphasized, there was no official

ecclesiastical directive about which Christian images were acceptable—and many different types of representation were patronized by different Christians in different regions as a great variety of pagan practices were adapted to express the superiority of the new creed. Within domestic spaces, images for protection, or the celebration of ancestors, or the cult of different gods and goddesses, in long-established practices, developed in parallel with more public manifestations, as Christianity penetrated the rich and diverse inheritances of pagan societies.

In the East, when Muslim forces overran familiar holy cities and surrounded shrines like St. Catherine's monastery on Mount Sinai, they challenged the use of any form of representative image of the human form because the revelation of Islam banned them all in accordance with Mosaic law. Icons, with their polyvalent values and uses, were only part of this. The threat to Christian imagery of every kind forced the church to define what was acceptable leading to the battle over icons, *eikonomachia*. In turn, defenders of icons developed their justifications, drawing on the practice of private, domestic veneration, supported by women in particular. It is likely that no specific, theologically justified veneration of icons was developed even informally before 600 (we can't be sure as so little has survived). For there was no need. But this doesn't mean that such icons played no part in religious worship or that icon worship did not exist. On the contrary, human representation in religious imagery was an unquestioned aspect of what it meant to worship as a Christian, all the more important for being simply presumed. Who were the daily agents of this assumption? Who bore its weight, carried out its duties, preserved its meaning and handed on its reproduction?

Many years later, after criticisms as well as silences, I think my interpretation stands. In terms of reception theory, icons permitted women to validate their faith through personal forms of worship undirected by priests in a practice inherited from antiquity. It is being borne out by further research on the Byzantine roots of modern Greek icon veneration and the roles of women in mourning and remembering the dead. Following the innovative work of Tom Mathews, who has traced the origins of the icon back to panel paintings of the pagan gods, which were also often hung in the private rooms of Roman families, it seems very likely that the icon corner replaced the hearth dedicated to the ancient household gods, the *lar*. Critically, both were maintained by the females of the house. In this respect, since ancient times women have assumed the domestic duty to protect the household and its members. Their maintenance of interior well-being, by ensuring divine aid, seems to flow from the ancient into the medieval world, from acts marking respect and devotion to the household gods to the veneration of icons that create a doorway to the Christian God.

From the cold-hearted obsession with existing sources that drives overzealous academics to the Marxism of even supremely gifted historians like Hobsbawm, the refusal to acknowledge unrecorded sentiment is an intellectual and historical failing. This is not an argument for being sentimental, but for recognizing the material force of the stubborn, domestic, emotional interests of the organizers of personal life. In this early essay, without realizing fully what I was letting myself in for, I claimed that this "expression of weakness" also had agency. Iconoclasm, despite its official supremacy in the Christian East for the best part of a century, was unable to crush this lasting force. Although the claim is still contested, today I regard it as a discovery, even though it needs all manner of further analysis, description, and measurement.

THE CULT OF ICONS presents several paradoxes. It runs directly counter to the Old Testament prohibition of "graven images," which was binding on early Christian communities, and it represents an

essentially pagan art form, the commemoration of the dead, ancestors, rulers, heroes, and divinities both mortal and immortal. This prompts the question: how did icons come to hold such a central position in Christian art? Had the church simply ignored the heathen roots and Mosaic interdiction of this type of representative art? Or had it justified a Christian adaptation and re-employment of older art forms by theological argument? One answer was given in the eighth century, when the Byzantine Empire tried to resolve the apparent contradiction built into this early Christian art by destroying icons and figurative art. A different one was developed by the Western church, which was not prepared to do away with its own tradition, supported by no less an authority than Pope Gregory the Great: "For what writing [*scriptura*] presents to readers, this a picture [*pictura*] presents to the unlearned who behold, since in it even the ignorant see what they ought to follow: in it the illiterate read. Hence, and chiefly to the nations [*gentibus*], a picture is instead of reading."¹ The challenge of iconoclasm revealed a deep commitment to Christian art, both in the East, where icon veneration finally triumphed, and in the West, where destruction was rejected outright. When under attack the icons found intense support throughout the church, although this iconophile response differed in important respects. In this chapter I shall be primarily concerned with the Eastern response, that faith in icons that represents a more personal type of dedication to Christian images.

Posing this problem means, in effect, seeking the origins of Christian art, a topic far too large and complex for a short essay. But within this long development the role of the icon is significant and merits special consideration. Icons center attention on one of the basic problems of the early church, the representation of holy persons, while simultaneously revealing features of the non-Christian antecedents of this art. I am concerned with this tradition. My approach will not be that of an art historian, nor will I deal with the theological debates over the propriety of figural imagery. I will discuss the place of icons in worship, their character and the way they came to symbolize the holy and mediate between earth and heaven. In particular, as icons became a vivid focus of devotion, they began to embody human relations with God the Creator and Ruler of the entire Christian world. And I will argue that women played a notable part in this developing cult of icons.

So without denying the theological dilemma of Christian representational art, I want to concentrate on some features of Late Antique Mediterranean culture, shared by Jews and Gentiles, pagan and Christian alike. These provided a common social experience within which the artistic evolution of the Christian church took place. In particular, the first part of this chapter will be devoted to a

discussion of funerary art, for this represents one of the most striking ways whereby Christians transmitted pagan rituals and artistic forms to their new faith. In the second part, I will examine some of the reasons for the preservation of these forms, once assimilated to a Christian mode, when they came under attack in the East, and will ask how much that response informs us about the role of women in the cult of icons.

FUNERARY ART

It is characteristic of human societies to treat death, the possibility of life after death, and obligations to dead ancestors as a major concern. The finality of material existence in this world is regularly contrasted with more eternal values and the completely immaterial hereafter. Burial rituals and funerary monuments everywhere reveal a basic concern shared by societies as different as nomadic Siberia and Pharaonic Egypt. While some leave more direct evidence in the form of written accounts of mourning or in particularly impressive tomb architecture, none totally discount the needs of the dead in whatever other world they have passed on to.

In the pre-Christian Mediterranean world a variety of beliefs was attached to the fate of the deceased, but the maintenance of family shrines and the perpetuation of the memory of ancestors through prescribed ceremonies was widely observed. The early Christian communities cannot have been unaware of their contemporaries' customs in this respect: from the Gospel of St. John (19.40) they would have known that Christ's body was embalmed with spices and bound with strips of linen in the Jewish fashion. In addition, the existence of classical mausolea and tombs must have been as familiar as the Egyptian habit of mummifying (which had been adopted by the first-century AD Jews of Palestine) and the Greek preference for cremation. The commemoration of dead rulers in funerary monuments and living emperors through images to which respect had to be shown, extended this practice into the daily political sphere. Tombstones, funerary urns, sarcophagi, and burial portraits provided proof of the ubiquitous concern to record and cherish the dead. The chief differences lay in the manner by which this was to be effected. Preservation of the body was naturally abhorrent to those who believed that the soul was released by death, but even they marked the final resting place of the ashes. Others, who did not practice incineration, built tombs that sometimes became public shrines. In the case of emperors, in particular, the distinction between private and public burial was almost impossible to maintain, and these tombs

were rarely restricted to immediate kin.²

As the first few generations of Christians were almost all converts from other faiths, they must have brought direct knowledge of traditional burial methods with them into the church. These were strengthened by subsequent missionary activity, for even in the fifth and sixth centuries nonbelievers of many varieties were still adopting the faith. The influence of such customary practices and means of commemorating the dead should not be underestimated. Christian burial customs, using both cemeteries and catacombs, marking graves with a portrait of the deceased and celebrating the good fortune of ancestors with annual feasting at the tomb, followed normal, heathen practice. Only by their belief in the resurrection and the life to come did the Christians set themselves apart from their contemporaries.³ And this distinguishing feature of the faith did not preclude funerary representations considered traditional in all cults. So it is hardly surprising that Christian art is found precisely in those places reserved for graves, often next door to examples of pagan and Jewish art on the graves of non-Christians. It is possible that the private houses where these early Christian communities met to celebrate their faith were also decorated, but if so this type of art has not survived. Only one building adapted for the specific function of baptism is known from the first three centuries AD—the baptistery at Dura Europos, an eastern frontier town destroyed by a Persian army in 256 and fortunately preserved under sand in the North Syrian desert. Interestingly, this small monument is completely overshadowed by other cult buildings in the same town: the spectacular frescoes of the synagogue, large statues of Palmyrene gods in their temple, and the decorated Mithraeum.⁴ Even if the paucity of other evidence has attributed undue prominence to the tomb art of the early church, great significance was attached to the burial rite, not only in Christianity but in most other Late Antique religions. Viewed in this perspective, catacomb art proves extremely revealing not only of Christian attitudes toward visual representation, but also of the long prehistory of burial ceremony that deeply influenced the early church. Another aspect of funerary art that made it suitable for the early communities was that it avoided some of the most obvious, official, pagan forms of art, works displayed in public places throughout the Roman world. Greek excellence in the field of free-standing statuary and the survival of many ancient statues of gods, athletes, rulers, and philosophers, often naked, may have prevented Christians from using this medium. A fourth-century emperor, on the other hand, could reuse a statue of Apollo as his own. Imperial statues and portraits in every city of the empire reminded the early Christians of the temporal rulers of the world, often persecutors, who demanded a secular

worship. Recognizing this public cult celebrated in lifelike paintings and life-size monuments, they shunned material images, reinforcing Christ's command to worship their heavenly Lord in spirit and in truth. Although attempts are occasionally made to argue that the early church was not implacably hostile to human representation, attention has more often been given to the apparent reluctance to portray the Founder of the faith and the preference for symbolic decoration. Evidently there was some anxiety associated with Christian figural art that could easily be mistaken for its pagan equivalent.⁵

The earliest surviving Christian graves are marked by shrines where offerings could be made, and by symbolic representations of the faith, doves of peace, loaves and fishes, the IXΘYC anagram, and the chi-rho sign. In addition, Christian families sometimes displayed a portrait of the departed and an inscription recording the name and genealogy.⁶ For all the faithful, the duty of honoring the dead was such an important one that Christian graves were bound to attract the type of art normally set up at tombs. In this respect the Egyptian tradition of preserving the body in mummy form and the Roman practice of depicting the deceased in a most lifelike fashion were very influential. The former required that the mummy should contain a portrait painted during the individual's lifetime, usually in encaustic (wax) on wood; this was inserted into the mummy over the face (as preserved on the complete mummy of Artemiodoros in the British Museum; [figure 1](#)). Many of the most delicate portraits are of young woman wearing their most expensive jewelry ([figure 2](#)), but portraits of older people, athletes and tradesmen have also survived, pagan works of the second century AD. The latter custom identified the grave with a sculpted bust or a portrait in low relief ([figure 3](#)), painting, or gold glass. Both seem to have been employed by Christians with sufficient means. For the poor, humbler imitations were used. There was no hesitancy about such funerary portraiture, it was the accepted manner of naming a grave and was widely adopted for private family tombs.⁷ In this way pre-Christian art forms were put to use in the church by those who converted from other faiths, and by those whose families had been Christian for generations. This art avoided the most obvious pagan associations of ancient statuary, but it was none the less rooted in ancient custom shared by many cults.

The tombs or places of martyrdom attached to the Christian heroes of Roman persecution naturally attracted particular attention, and these gradually developed into cult sites. In their determination to honor and revere those who had suffered death for the faith, Christians of the third and fourth centuries created new centers and new forms of worship. The traditional places of death and burial of the martyrs, tombs already set apart both by their physical setting and

by the character of the deceased, began to serve a public function as martyria. Pilgrims visited these sites with a heightened sense of awe, recording in graffiti their belief that the figures enshrined would intercede for them, protecting and guiding their lesser coreligionaries.⁸ In the slow transition from plain grave to cult shrine a variety of means for indicating divine approval, ranging from the saint's halo to the Hand of God receiving the martyr, were employed to emphasize the proximity of such heroes to God himself. Thus, by the early fourth century the cult of martyrs had established both the main type of Christian building and its artistic decoration (churches were still a rarity). These patterns were inherited by the first Christians, who benefited from Constantine I's decision to grant the church an official status, tolerated and equal to the many other cults of the empire.



Figure 1. Stucco case of mummy of Artemiodorus, from Hawara, Egypt, early second century AD. British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

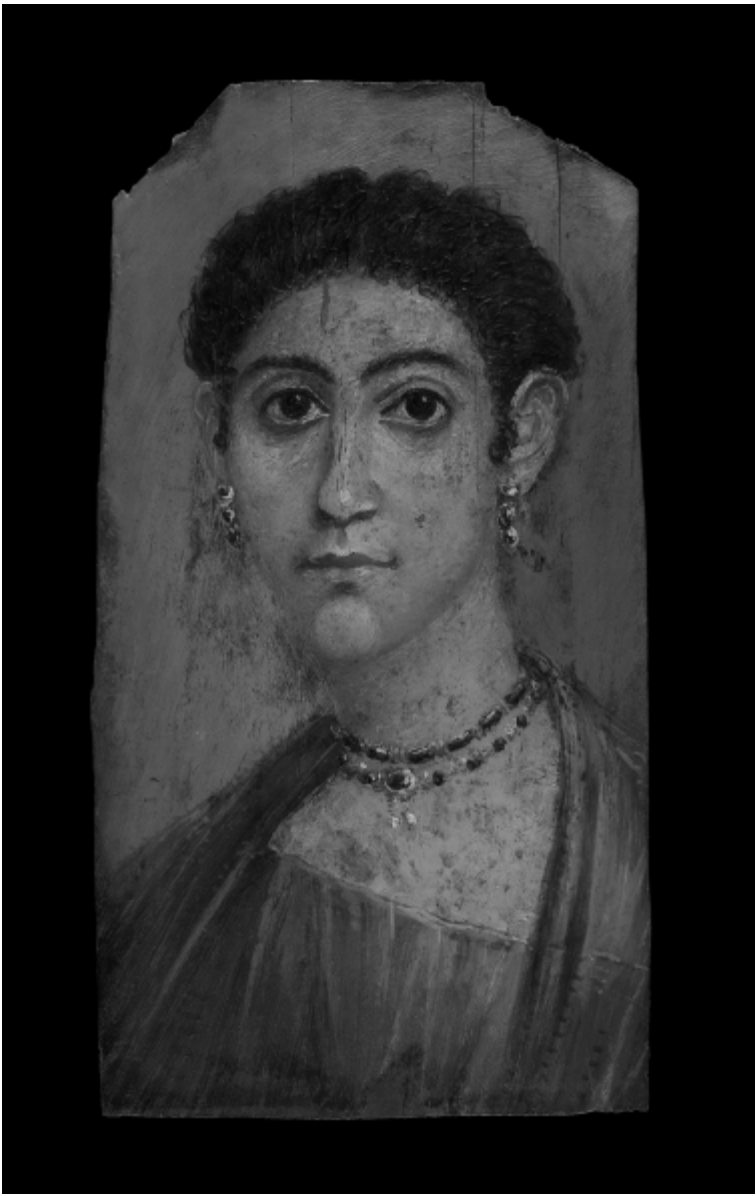


Figure 2. Portrait of a young woman in encaustic, from Hawara, Egypt, second century AD. British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 3. Tombstone of Shenoute, from the White Monastery near Sohag, Egypt, shortly after 451. Photo: Antje Voigt (Inv. 4475). Collection: Sculpture Collection and Museum of Byzantine Art, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

This fundamental change in the position of the Christian communities was responsible, by and large, for the development of Christian art. Once the faith could be celebrated openly and above ground, it needed larger buildings, and these required decoration. Constantine led the way in commissioning new monuments, and a whole range of wealthy patrons followed his example. I should like to stress just one aspect of the growth of this official art: the importance of Constantine's "discovery" of the site of Christ's martyrdom, Golgotha, and the associated holy places of Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The fact that this was carried out under imperial instructions and with the active support of Constantine's mother, Helena, does not mean that it was different from the established tradition of identifying and celebrating the sites of martyrdom. It was simply more significant and achieved with greater resources. Once the actual tomb had been

found, Constantine endowed the most magnificent church, setting aside revenues from provincial taxation and instructing the bishop of Jerusalem to acquire the costliest and most splendid building materials. The stress on luxurious and lavish decoration of the church of the Holy Sepulchre, intended as a demonstration of the wealth both worldly and spiritual of the Christian faith, stood in marked contrast to the meager resources of the provincial episcopal center.⁹ Imperial investment in this construction, which set an altar directly above the holy spot, reinforced the tradition of martyria. For centuries to come, churches would be founded on the tombs of the saints.¹⁰

While Constantine's building activity in Palestine adorned the *loca sancta* (holy places) and unearthed the few relics of Christ's martyrdom (the True Cross, crown of thorns, nails, lance, and sponge), the revolution in the status of the faith permitted Christians to express their beliefs without restraint. The combination of these factors produced a rapid increase in pilgrimage to the sites of the Passion, as well as the settlement of individual holy people and entire monastic communities close by. Reading the accounts of these early pilgrims, there is an overwhelming impression of the importance attached to physical contact; Christians sought to touch, to kiss and to embrace objects associated with their Founder's earthly existence—the manger at Bethlehem, the place of baptism in the Jordan, the spot from which Christ ascended. All the associations of the cult of saints and martyrs were here magnified. The same desire for proximity to the holy places and actual contact with the relics, plus the longing for some reminder of them, contributed to the development of cult objects that had been placed close to the source of holiness, which contained oil from lamps in particular shrines or water from holy streams. Frequently, these souvenirs were decorated with scenes from the life of Christ, the Baptism on a flask of Jordan water, the Ascension on one containing dust from the very spot at which the Apostles had witnessed the event. Small pilgrim flasks in metal or clay were most commonly used to transport this precious contact home to those Christians who were unable to make a pilgrimage. But in addition, holy objects such as stones from Calvary were carried off in great quantities: the trade in relics had begun.¹¹

This public commemoration of the Founder of the church and its first heroes was rapidly extended to its fourth-century leaders. In Antioch after the death of Bishop Meletios (381), the inhabitants called their sons after him and set up his image in their homes, in public places, and on their rings, seals, and bowls.¹² The double consolation of hearing his name and seeing his image everywhere was enhanced by the belief that he would protect and look after his flock. Such local cults consolidated and expanded the traditional role of

martyria, emphasizing the significance of visual representation. For shrines were identified partly by the images in them, and these in turn generated a standard iconography of the saints, recognized by their attributes and scenes from their lives. The great column saint Symeon the Stylite was another local patron of Antioch, but was also celebrated in Rome, where craftsmen set up little images of him in their workshops for protection. His cult, like that of St. Menas, was spread by pilgrim flasks and visual depictions of his column.¹³ Bishops of Constantinople, painted on panels displayed in the Forum, were destroyed during fourth-century battles between Arian and Orthodox supporters. Portraits of Roman pontiffs are also known to have existed.¹⁴

In this context of proliferating personal representations, the question of depicting God in other than symbolical or allegorical form became more pressing. Two factors in particular appear to have helped to resolve this problem: the identification of the holy places, which drew attention to Christ's incarnation and life on earth, and the debates over His nature or natures, which were concluded at the Council of Chalcedon (451) in a decisive statement of the union of the human and the divine. The divine being uncircumscribable, artists found a legitimate way of representing God through the human Christ. This was not, of course, a straightforward procedure. Doubts persisted as to the propriety of such portraits and the actual depictions. In the sixth century an ecclesiastical historian could claim that the type with short frizzy hair was more authentic than the long-haired type that resembled Zeus.¹⁵ Pagans had observed this Christian adoption and by this period they employed the same device to hide their continued devotion to Zeus through apparent pictures of Christ. According to Christian sources, such devious means were always revealed and the pagans exposed, by some miracle worked by the image itself or by a fearful retribution administered to the pagan painter.¹⁶

It is often forgotten that traditional classical forms were maintained in imperial and pagan portraiture, statues, tombstones, and public monuments side by side with Christian art. Neither had an exclusive control over the established media, which were also used by adherents of other cults. What we think of as being an unmistakably Christian style was achieved more by the official suppression of pagan and oriental beliefs than by the conscious development of specifically Christian art forms. In the case of encaustic panel paintings from Egypt, there does appear to be a decline in their production from the third century, possibly indicating that this medium was not favored by the church.¹⁷ Instead, the earliest Christian art from Egypt seems to have employed sculpture in low relief for its personal representations, adapting another pagan form and maintaining the traditional concern

for a frontal portrait, which draw attention to the eyes and face of the holy person (figure 4). On the tombstone of Apa Shenute from the White Monastery near Sohag, we see the abbot in his monastic robe carrying a staff with the long pallium of his office over his shoulder. He was a disciple of Pachom, who founded the first communities, and he spread this organized ascetic way of life through his own monasteries in Upper Egypt. The carving probably dates from shortly after his death in 451 and was made at the request of his monks to commemorate his pioneering role.¹⁸ The earliest surviving icons, which seem to date from the sixth century, introduce a much greater sophistication through the use of encaustic, paralleled in the continued production of secular portraits. The church could not make this medium its sole preserve until the whole tradition of classical portraiture had died away.¹⁹



Figure 4. Egyptian stele (upper part), relief of a bearded saint, fourth to seventh centuries. Dumbarton Oaks Collection.

One of the consequences of the church's new role in society and overt Christian worship can be seen in the determination to identify all the sites mentioned in the Bible and to track down every tiny relic of Apostolic times, however small. The researches of Origen, Jerome, and Eusebius, whose *Onomastikon* lists biblical place-names with their fourth-century equivalents, represents the former.²⁰ The tracing of

“real” portraits of Christ and the Virgin reflects the latter. Although St. Luke’s painting of the Virgin and Child is a purely apocryphal story, this very picture was allegedly discovered by Eudocia, the wife of Theodosius II, who lived in Jerusalem from 443 to 460, and was sent to Constantinople. There were already two important relics of the Virgin in the Byzantine capital, the veil and the girdle, housed in splendid shrines that were later decorated with large votive images; the “portrait” by St. Luke may have been set up in one of them.²¹ Similarly, the legendary stories of towels on which Christ had imprinted His features seem to go back to the same period. King Abgar’s request for a painting of Christ had proved to be an impossible task for the artist, but one such towel supposedly carried back to Edessa in Christ’s lifetime was rediscovered in the sixth century as a precious relic. A comparable “authenticity” was occasionally claimed for images known as *acheiropoièta*, icons not made by human hand, of which the Kamoulia icon of Christ was a famous sixth-century example (it was also based on a miraculous image on a cloth and thus had a double pedigree).²² For some images of great beauty angels were held responsible, for instance the Kiti mosaic made by angels, *aggeloktistos* (see [figure 5](#)), while other nonhuman hands guided craftsmen in the execution of particular representations of Christ. In all artistic activity divine intervention was possible and certain images could therefore be invested with holy authority.²³

However they were supposed to have been produced, all these representations of Christ, the Virgin, Apostles, and Saints took as their model the human form. If God had originally made man in His own image, the same was true of fourth- and fifth-century Christian artists: they painted Christ in their own image, with the most natural and familiar human attributes.²⁴ This principle applied equally to votive images set up by people in their own homes, for example pictures of a particular saint or holy man whose aid had benefited the individual, and to monumental images erected by emperors and commissioned by bishops to adorn churches. In both private and public buildings Christian art presented its chief figures in the guise of friends, spiritual leaders, and benevolent helpers in the world of the living, that is, in exactly the same way as the Christian dead. Although none could claim the Holy Family as their direct ancestors, in an important way the Christian community had always cultivated the familial sense of being one with Christ, and this feeling was perpetuated by such cult images. This identification of fifth- and sixth-century believers with the founders of their faith can be traced through many literary sources, which reveal the depth of feeling generated by Christian art. In dreams, frequently the medium of communication between the divine and ordinary mortals, saints are recognized by their

resemblance to portraits in churches and homes.²⁵ Images of the Virgin and Christ are responsible for the conversion of stubborn pagans, often through some potent display of power to chastise or cure. This evidence suggests that the relatively novel role of the saints as intercessors was gaining strength, precisely because of the approachability of well-known and well-loved holy persons.



Figure 5. Apse mosaic of the Virgin and Child flanked by archangels, church of the Panagia Aggeloktistos, Kiti, Cyprus (detail), late sixth century. Judith Herrin and Courtauld Institute.

For women the Virgin appears to have filled this role most effectively. Their identification with the maternal anxieties and sufferings of Christ's Mother, the *Theotokos* (who bore God), developed in parallel with Her special cult, first elaborated at the

Council of Ephesos (431).²⁶ A female model of holiness was probably appealing to those who had been characterized and condemned as so many duplications of Eve. It was certainly responsible for the conversion of St. Mary the Egyptian according to the traditional account of her repentance at the sight of the Virgin's image at Jerusalem. Another icon of the Virgin in the church at Sozopolis (in southern Asia Minor) was held to be capable of miraculous cures and attracted women who were unable to conceive. A couple from Amaseia made the pilgrimage to Sozopolis and were cured by the application of some holy oil from the lamp that hung in front of the icon; they later returned with their son, Peter, to give thanks to the Virgin.²⁷

This cult was not limited to the East, or to women. The fresco panel erected in the Catacomb of St. Comodilla in Rome to commemorate the widow Turtura in 528 illustrates its appeal, in the West. It shows the Virgin seated on a jeweled throne holding the Child on Her lap and flanked by saints. At the bottom left stands Turtura in black, with a scroll recording her gratitude to the Virgin.²⁸ Apart from a slight difference of scale, the holy figures being larger than the donor, there is no distinction in the humanity of all persons represented. But by Her central position, Her attributes, and Her direct frontal gaze, the Virgin is set apart—close enough for the identification between women to be made, yet distant in the same way as all the dead—beyond the world yet within reach of the living. In the Christian devotion of the sixth century this painting fills the same role as the icon in the East. It is also remarkably similar to one of the earliest surviving icons, an enthroned Virgin and Child with saints preserved in the monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai.²⁹

Of course, the cult of the Virgin was by no means restricted to female adherents, as male devotion to the icon of Sozopolis shows, nor were women unable to express their religious emotions in front of male figures of sanctity. In the early years of the seventh century an icon of St. John the Baptist, housed in a church in Constantinople, commanded the attention of a certain lady called Anna who lived nearby. Following her parents' tradition, she lit a lamp in front of this icon every evening, sending a young girl to do this for her if she was too busy.³⁰ The Virgin, however, represented a meaningful example of female holiness, which does appear to have been appreciated by women.

By the middle of the sixth century the literary evidence for a cult of icons is so strong that no one could doubt that figural representation was approved by the church. It was employed by ecclesiastical leaders such as patriarchs of Constantinople, especially during periods of doctrinal warfare when rival candidates sought to impose their control

over the church. It also appears to have been used by bishops who were perhaps prevented from residing in their episcopal sees. The appointment of Abraham, abbot of the Phoibammon monastery at Luxor in Upper Egypt, to the see of Hermonthis probably occasioned the painting of his icon ([figure 6](#)). Owing to his great holiness, Abraham is shown with a halo; he wears episcopal robes, carries a Gospel book, and appears as the archetypal Egyptian monk, dedicated to ascetic practices. From written sources Abraham is known as a contemporary of Patriarch Damianos of Alexandria (578–605), and was a famous monastic leader and writer, as well as the fourteenth bishop of Hermonthis. It is likely that he continued to reside at this monastery when appointed to the see and that the icon was made and sent to his episcopal church to be displayed (it has holes to facilitate mounting on a wall). It probably dates from the beginning of his episcopate, ca. 590/600, and may have been returned to his monastery after his death in ca. 610/20.³¹ As no other portraits of bishops have survived, it would be rash to assume that this display of icons of living churchmen was customary. Indeed, other sources would seem to indicate a continuing ambivalence about portraits of contemporaries.

Under Patriarch Sergios of Constantinople (610–38), the monks of the Romaion monastery were visited by St. Theodore of Sykeon, a famous holy man (who was, incidentally, devoted to the Sozopolis icon). He succeeded in curing a monk possessed by an evil spirit, and as a reminder of this blessing on their community the monks wanted a picture of the saint. Realizing that this wish might not be granted, they instructed a painter to observe Theodore through a small concealed opening, so that he could capture the holy man's likeness in an icon. Afterward they showed the image to Theodore, who smiled and told the painter that he had stolen something, but he agreed to bless the object and pardoned the artist.³² Several features of this story are interesting: Theodore's reluctance to be painted, his characterization of the painting as theft, and his final blessing of it, which clearly gave it greater authority. The first appears to be related to an understanding of the power of icons; the second to their extremely lifelike quality; while the third typifies the manner in which such portraits painted in the lifetime of the subject were sanctioned as a substitute. This was to become the standard way for people of extreme sanctity to be venerated both while they were alive and after their death.

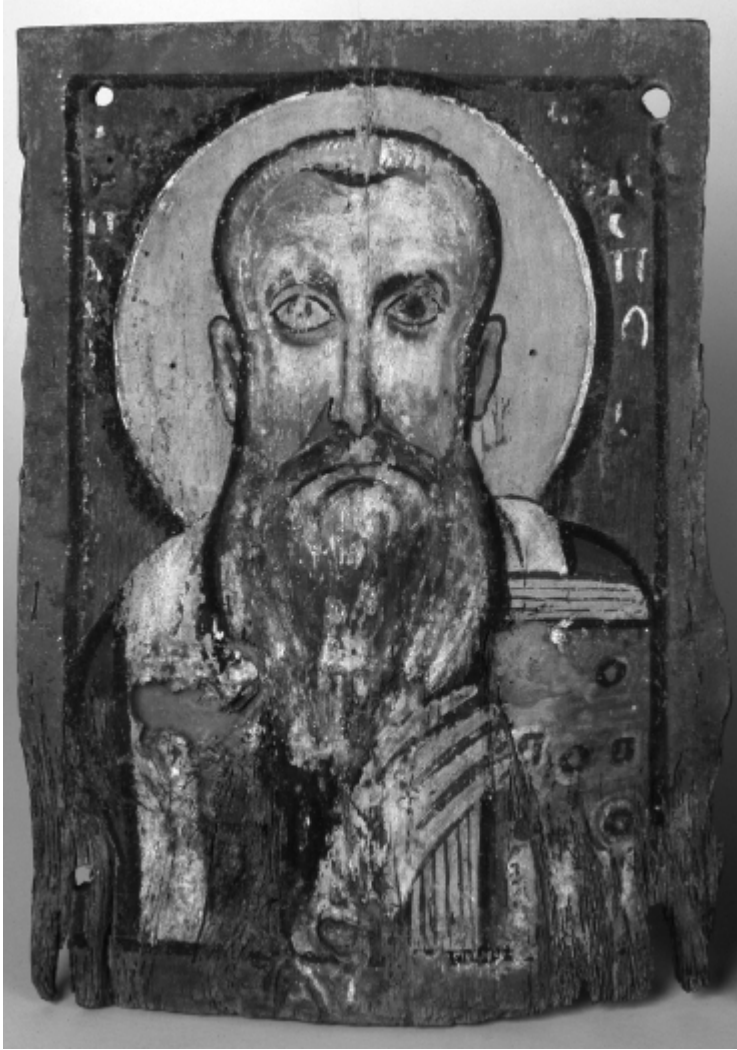


Figure 6. Portrait of Bishop Abraham of Hermonthis, from Luxor, Egypt, ca. 590–600. Photo: M. Hilbich (Inv. 6114). Collection: Sculpture Collection and Museum of Byzantine Art, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

To understand the power generated by these cult images, it is necessary to look at them closely. Fortunately a few painted in the sixth and seventh centuries have survived, most of them housed on Mount Sinai, where they escaped outbreaks of iconoclasm both Christian and Muslim.³³ An analysis of these artifacts brings us much closer to the faith experienced by the early Christians.

The word *eikôn* means any image or representation, but these early icons generally show a portrait of Christ, the Virgin and Child, Apostles, or saints, in pairs or singly, and scenes from the life of Christ. Occasionally, full-length standing figures are shown, alone or

in groups as in the Gospel scenes, but there is a marked preference for the head and shoulders portrait which concentrates attention on the face of the holy person. This is further intensified by the regular use of a plain gold background, comparable to the tradition of early Christian mosaics (for example, the Kiti apse mosaic; see [figure 5](#)). For the moment I shall leave aside the narrative icons, which do not occur among the earliest examples, and which are not devotional objects of prayer in the same sense. Three of these sixth-century icons have a background of classical architectural features, reminiscent of the sculpted portrait bust placed in a niche, but this appears to be a feature of one particular workshop, possibly an imperial one in Constantinople. In size the early icons that have survived range from 92×53 cm to 20.1×11.6 cm.³⁴ They are all painted in encaustic on thin pieces of wood, that is, using the ancient technique of heating wax until it is malleable, adding the color, and applying it in layers on the wooden base.³⁵

It is this technique that determines the first characteristic of such portrait icons: their uncannily human quality. This is produced by the blending of different shades of colored wax to imitate lifelike flesh tones and to depict highlights in the eyes and on hair and garments. Even on a plain gold ground the halo of a saint may be marked out by a slightly raised surface, emphasized by almost undetectable red spots, which catches the light ([figure 7](#)). The sophisticated and subtle qualities of encaustic had been used throughout the ancient world for portrait painting, and the technique was adapted in the sixth century, possibly earlier, for Christian imagery. This development of encaustic icons, however, had a very much wider appeal and rapidly gained prominence as the preferred medium of Christian art. It was probably the highly naturalistic and convincing representations of the Holy Family and saints, who appeared more familiar and closer to the viewer through their evidently personal quality, that encouraged this spectacular growth. Proximity, accessibility, and recognizability were all stressed in these icons, qualities most necessary for the role of intercessor that Christians hoped to find in Christ, the Virgin, and saints. While God Himself was never depicted, these holy persons who could intercede with Him on man's behalf took up a station midway between the world below and heaven above. The icons created a new focus for the worshipper, bringing the divine into his own home in an approachable and comprehensible fashion.

The second characteristic of these portrait icons is that they address the beholder very directly, frequently through a marked frontality.³⁶ The holy figure looks at the believer with an intentness that emphasizes the personal relationship between them and the immediacy of their communication. Whether the former is delivering

a message, or the latter is making a prayer, their contact is intensified across the space that separates them. This is especially noticeable when the icon is displayed at eye level and gives rise to the well-known optical illusion of the gaze that appears to follow the beholder—the all-seeing eye from whom nothing can be hidden. Although this phenomenon is documented from ancient times onward and could not have been new to the Byzantines, the frontal icon employs it in a manner that commands attention from a wide arc. When the figure seems to direct itself personally to each and every viewer, its authority is greatly enhanced, and they all feel themselves recipients of a special message. The force is strongest with a totally frontal pose, but even the figure that does not look straight at the spectator can arouse similar feelings of immediacy, for the lifelike quality suggests that he or she has just glanced aside and might turn back at any moment. Normally, an unswerving communication is established at first glance. This is effectively illustrated by the Sinai icon of Christ (see [figure 7](#)), previously assigned to the thirteenth century and now redated in the sixth, since under the overpainting an original deposit of encaustic layers was revealed in cleaning.³⁷ Christ is here shown raising His right hand in blessing and holding a gemmed Gospel manuscript in His left, but the viewer's attention is immediately drawn to the face and particularly the eyes. Although this is a majestic and awe-inspiring figure, it has an emphatically human aspect achieved by the subtle treatment of the flesh, the shading on the throat and under the cheekbones and the piercing quality of the eyes. These are not of equal size—the left eye is larger and more widely opened—and this asymmetrical arrangement possibly reflects the ancient *topos* of dual expression. One eye is the calm approving one; the other a hostile and rejecting one.³⁸ While the tradition was to be developed into the rather terrifying Pantocrator images of Daphni and Cefalù in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, on this icon it lends itself to a more benevolent visage. This is a very human God.

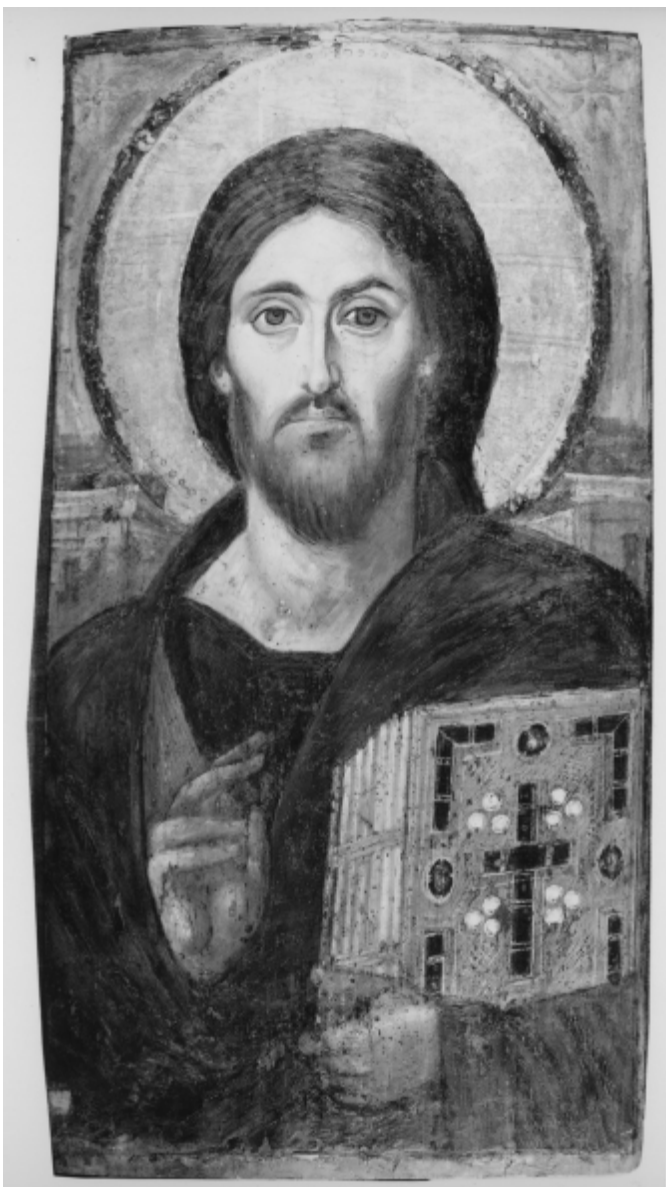


Figure 7. Icon of Christ, monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai, sixth century (reproduced through the courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai). Also reproduced in K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of S. Catherine at Mount Sinai*, vol. 1, *The Icons*, plate I (Princeton, 1976).

These two characteristics give rise to a third consideration: the private nature of personal devotion before an icon. In accounts of the earliest use of icons it is clear that they were displayed in homes, very often when an individual wished to give thanks to a particular saint or holy person for assistance or consolation. After being cured by Saint Symeon Stylites, women and men made shrines in their homes with

images of their benefactor. These sometimes proved to be healing agents themselves. In other cases, persistent faith in saints with special powers, such as Artemios and Febronia and their images, was rewarded by cures.³⁹ Similarly, people going on journeys often carried an icon with them, partly for their prayers but mainly for the protection it would provide.⁴⁰ Such portable icons were probably small, had lids to protect the painted surfaces, and were produced in large numbers, unlike the costly and unique icons commissioned by rich patrons for their churches. Local saints were depicted on these lidded icons; for instance, people from Galatia in central Anatolia might carry an icon of Saint Platon. In a colorful story related by a monk on Mount Sinai, a pilgrim from Galatia, who was captured by desert brigands, was released by his local saint, whom he recognized as Platon from his likeness to portrait icons. However unlikely the story seems, one of these icons has survived in the Mount Sinai collection and provides an instructive illustration of this type ([figure 8](#)).⁴¹ Saint Platon is shown together with an unidentified female companion or martyr on his left, both gazing out from the icon to the beholder. Between them, faintly delineated on the gold ground, is a cross studded with gems indicated by circles. Both figures have large staring eyes, long noses, and oval faces that are disproportionately large for their bodies. They occupy only the lower half of the icon, leaving an extensive background space unfilled. Clearly, the execution of this icon is rough and primitive in comparison with Constantinopolitan works of the same period, but it strives to create the same impression.

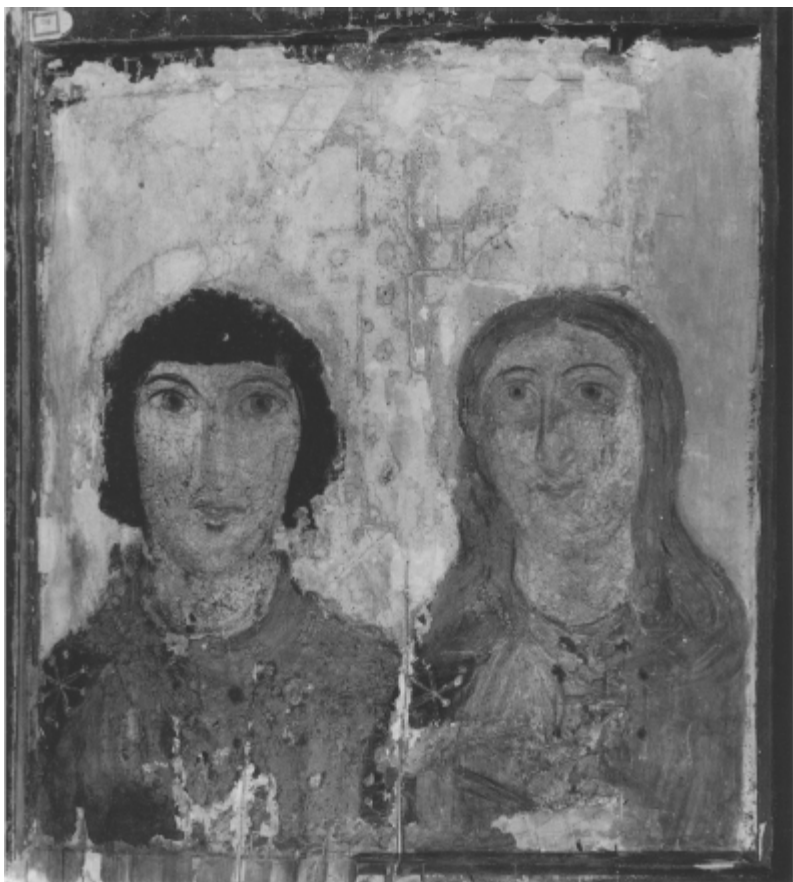


Figure 8. Icon of St. Platon and a female martyr, monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai, seventh century. From Weitzmann, vol. 1, plate LXI.

Both the literary evidence and the actual icons suggest that people found these domestic cult objects reassuring and protective. The individual's attachment to one special saint or holy person was deepened by the intense private devotion paid to his representation displayed in the owner's home. Freed from all public and prescribed rituals, the worshipper entered into an extremely personal communication with the saint, which seems to have satisfied a basic need for divine approval. Possibly this need was no longer being met by the services of the ecclesiastical hierarchy; possibly churches were felt to be too crowded, too noisy, or too large for such isolated acts of worship; or the domestic icon may simply have provided an additional means of communicating with the holy. Although no single explanation seems to account for the expansion of the personal icon cult, its domestic character and privacy of direct communication must be significant components.

In connection with this cult I should now like to examine one aspect of icon veneration that is not adequately understood, its importance for women. When I first read Byzantine accounts of female devotion to icons, I dismissed them as yet another example of the common slurs on woman-kind perpetrated by uniformly male writers. After closer inspection, I feel that this opinion should be revised. For what we read about their attachment to icons is surely a reflection of their homebound situation, their restricted access to churches, and their frustrated religious passion. Not all women could aspire to the monastic ideal, and their expression of faith within the confines of the secular world was limited. Since their existence required some divine sanction to make it more bearable, they clung to the icons tenaciously. Through these at least they had an outlet for their pent-up feelings. Hence, the association of women and iconophiles may not be only a disparaging male comment on female weakness and incapacity to understand the higher points of theology: there may be a real connection between icons and the way Byzantine women worshipped. This is not to claim that all icons functioned in an identical fashion; some were used as palladia, paraded around the walls of besieged cities, or as standards at the head of a fighting force going out into battle. Nor is the devotion to icons restricted to women; as we have seen, men shared this cult, but they had additional and alternative ways of expressing their belief in public ritual and through the ecclesiastical orders. For women, however, the icon offered a special approach to religion, an individual contact with a particular holy person, which could be exercised without restriction (as in the case of Anna and the icon of St. John the Baptist). It is in this context that I wish to examine the female defense of icons under attack.

Of the known cases of such devotion dating from the period of icon destruction (iconoclasm), several women are empresses,⁴² many are related to iconophile saints, and others reflect the attitude of the women of Constantinople. The most famous are undoubtedly Irene and Theodora, who restored the official worship of icons in 787 and 843, respectively. Irene came from Athens as the chosen bride of Leo IV, the third iconoclast emperor of the Syrian dynasty; the couple were married in the capital with great pomp and ceremony in 768 and one year later their son, Constantine, was born.⁴³ Irene's iconophile sympathies can hardly have been recognized at the time of the marriage, and may only have developed later. They must, nonetheless, have been strongly felt, for it was not an easy task to undo forty-five years of iconoclast domination within the church and restore the icons to their former position, as Irene did after Leo's death. After one

premature attempt in 786, this was achieved at the Council of Nicaea held in 787. Irene was, of course, assisted by able theologians and ecclesiastical administrators, as well as an impressive circle of persecuted monks, who returned enthusiastically to the capital as soon as the prospect of a restoration of icons became known. A good deal of the initiative in this process must be placed with the empress, however, as the church was firmly in the hands of the iconoclast party and the imperial administration had been purged of all with persistent iconophile views.

In the case of Theodora, we are again faced with the apparent female commitment to icon veneration in the wife of an iconoclast ruler. But the manner by which Theodora became empress was a rather singular one: she was selected in a beauty contest, with less concern paid to her origins or upbringing (she was in fact the daughter of a Paphlagonian landowner and quite a suitable match except for her iconophile beliefs). The emperor who chose her was the iconoclast Theophilos (829–42), who persecuted icon worshippers without fully realizing his wife's secret devotion to the same cause.⁴⁴ But Theodora's protection of iconophiles and support for their party were concealed from Theophilos, taking advantage of the privacy of female quarters in the imperial palace (which had also served as a hiding place for some of Justinian's opponents in the time of the earlier Empress Theodora).⁴⁵ In this illicit support for iconophiles, Theodora was assisted and encouraged by her mother-in-law, Euphrosyne, who had arranged the bride show. Euphrosyne was the grand-daughter of Irene and daughter of Constantine VI; she had been brought up as a devout iconophile and had become a nun while her family faded into obscurity. Her marriage to Michael II was obviously one of political convenience, intended to strengthen the emperor's lack of imperial qualifications, and it ignored Euphrosyne's religious beliefs. These were maintained, however, and were responsible for the induction of her grandchildren into the iconophile cause. Together Theodora and Euphrosyne arranged for the imperial family to learn to venerate icons, while Theophilos continued to persecute iconophiles such as Methodios, the future patriarch.⁴⁶ Only after her husband's death in 842 did Theodora reveal her attachment to the cult and embark on a campaign of restoration. This time there was much less opposition and the reestablishment of icon veneration was more securely rooted by the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, a liturgical and theological innovation to justify and consolidate the position of icons in the Eastern Church.⁴⁷

In the uniformly prejudiced iconophile sources that have survived, many iconophile women are related to monks and saints who suffered persecution for their faith in icons. This close association with the

victims of iconoclast attack, which is documented largely in their *Lives*, renders their commitment rather conventional; it is almost like a *topos* (cf. the saints of other periods whose parents were humble but deeply religious and made special efforts to have their children taught the Psalms and Gospel stories). But sometimes the account documents a particular form that is interesting, for example, the devotion that St. Stephen's mother felt for the icon of the Virgin housed in the church at Blachernai, and the personal communication and aid that she experienced at this Constantinople shrine.⁴⁸ An outstanding example of iconophile piety is given by St. Theodore of Stoudios in his funeral oration for his mother. Other women supporters are documented by his correspondence.⁴⁹ Throughout the saints' *Lives* of the eighth and ninth centuries there are references to such women who protected icon worshippers, for instance, a lady whose estate near Constantinople was a hiding place and later monastery for Saint Nicolas.⁵⁰ But all these sources present a partisan view, denigrating iconoclasts and overpraising iconophiles to such a degree that we should treat them with caution. The only conclusion to be drawn from them with confidence seems to be that the iconophile party had female supporters, which is not entirely surprising.

A further association between female devotion and the cause of the icons is provided by the *Life* of St. Stephen and concerns the inhabitants of Constantinople. The first instance occurred when Leo III ordered the icon of Christ that was displayed on the Bronze Gate of the imperial palace to be taken down: among those who protested against this action, women led the attack and killed one of the men sent to remove the icon.⁵¹ Clearly, this decision, the first overt move against icons, directed against a prominent image well-known in the capital, would not have passed unnoticed. And it would have been natural for crowds near the palace at the time to have protested. Whether women in particular, hearing of the intended removal, rushed to the palace to try and prevent it is another matter. Stephen's biographer implies this in his description of their violent killing of a *spatharios* and subsequent stone-throwing attack on the patriarch's residence. Was he really exaggerating their role in order to claim them as the first iconophile martyrs, a claim not made explicitly in other sources?⁵²

A second instance of metropolitan women maintaining the worship of icons occurs later in the *Life* when St. Stephen is imprisoned in the Praetorium. Here the wife of a jailer not only provides sustenance for the iconophile prisoners, whom the saint has organized as in a monastic community, but also brings in her own icons so that they may make their devotions in the traditional manner.⁵³ This is a more convincing picture of female courage in resisting iconoclasm, as it

takes place in the capital, generally understood as the bastion of iconoclast practice, and within a prison crowded with iconophile opponents, where imperial control must have been strong. It confirms the private and domestic nature of iconophile worship, recording the secret possession of three icons stored under lock and key in a chest, which the woman managed to conceal from her husband and the other jailers. One of these icons depicted the Virgin and Child, the other two were of Saints Peter and Paul. Although the episode may be an inflated account of some female support for St. Stephen and his fellow prisoners, it seems to contain an indication of the ways in which iconophile practices were maintained throughout periods of persecution. In the 760s, when the saint was imprisoned, Constantine V had only just begun the violent campaign that would lead to Stephen's martyrdom. But the commitment to oppose iconoclasm had been made by women of no great means or education such as the jailer's wife, and at risk to their lives these people would continue to shelter the monastic victims of iconoclast attack.

Such evidence alone hardly provides a basis for analyzing the relationship between women and icons, but taken in conjunction with the social restraints imposed on Byzantine women in the seventh and eighth centuries it suggests the following highly tentative conclusions. The cult of icons provided a suitable vehicle for the expression of female religiosity, being a very personal one that could be practiced privately either at church or at home. For those who owned domestic icons there were no restrictions on their devotions. For others icon veneration even in public places was less bound by particular ceremonies; it required no assistance from ecclesiastical officials and was not limited to the public celebrations of the liturgy; it could be performed at the individual's convenience and in an anonymous fashion. Given the limited participation available to women in regular church services, when they occupied special galleries or areas segregated from men, they may have found greater satisfaction in the worship associated with icons.⁵⁴

Another factor in the attraction of icons lay in the very narrow ecclesiastical roles open to women.⁵⁵ In the early centuries of the church, before the so-called Edict of Toleration, Christian communities accorded their female members a higher status with greater equality than could be maintained in the fourth-century expansion and organization of an official faith. From a position that included the potential role of martyr (and women were martyred for their Christian beliefs), their active participation was restricted to the order of deaconesses, which declined after the sixth century. There were no institutionalized female offices within the church. A male hierarchy dominated every public expression of belief, admitting men to certain

lay positions but denying an equivalent role to women. Only in the philanthropic work of caring for the sick and supporting the poor were women permitted to excel, and such charitable work was largely dependent on private means and thus impossible for these without wealth. Similarly, it was harder for a Byzantine woman of average or less than average means to enter a nunnery than those with substantial dowries and land. Once established within a monastic community, however, women could express their faith fully and could attain a position of unassailable religiosity. Byzantium produced a number of female saints, many of them from wealthy backgrounds, very few of humble origins. So for the majority of Byzantine women, there were almost no outlets for religious expression apart from the cults associated with particular saints and protectors (especially the Virgin). In this context image veneration established an approved method of worship that was not dependent upon the authorities; it enabled women to find a personal and positive way of expressing their fervor.

The female devotion to icons is sometimes explained by the assumed susceptibility of women to all that is superstitious, to a particularly female belief in miracles and expectation of healing affected by cult objects. The Byzantine sources that document the growth of the cult of icons do not support this generalization; on the contrary, they reveal the universal spread of such beliefs and the equal participation of men in the veneration of icons. Of course, more men than women were literate and had some understanding of the theological debates of the times. But we should not assume that their education made them necessarily less susceptible to a fanciful interpretation of phenomena not understood until the sixteenth century. Nor did the development of icons with healing powers introduce an inevitable superstition: the church firmly believed that God could perform miracles through the medium of icons.⁵⁶ So the attraction of icons was not based solely on the illiterate and superstitious nature of women, but conversely female devotion to these images may have been related to their position in society. There may be a structural reason for their iconophilism.

We know very little about the personal beliefs of any Byzantine women. Even in the case of those individuals discussed earlier, there are no autobiographical records to assist us in reconstructing their views. They have to be judged by few documented acts. For Theodora there is clear evidence of her commitment to icons during her husband's iconoclast persecutions. She had her own icons in the gynaeceum of the palace and sent her children to their grandmother's monastery for instruction in iconophile veneration. Yet after 842 she did not immediately restore the image of Christ to the obverse of the

gold coinage, preferring to establish her own authority as ruler in association with the young heirs, Thekla and Michael (figure 9). In the case of Irene practically nothing is known.⁵⁷ She seems to have replaced the Christ icon on the Bronze Gate of the imperial palace and endowed some iconophile church decoration, as well as erecting a statue of herself and her son, the unfortunate Constantine VI.⁵⁸ After his removal from power, she commemorated her sole rule by placing her own image on both sides of the coinage—a new departure in Byzantine design (see figure 9). We do not know if she had harbored a deep commitment to the cause of icons during her short marriage to Leo IV, if she had domestic icons of her own, or if she adopted the iconophile position for purely political reasons. The latter cannot be ruled out, for we are dealing with an untypical woman, who did not stop at the blinding of her own son, when he stood in the way of her ambition.⁵⁹

Given their position in Byzantine society and the type of worship that the icon offered, I think that women were more probably iconophiles than iconoclasts. Precisely because the icon facilitated a private and personal form of worship, it was favored by those excluded from public services. And their enthusiasm for the human depiction of holy persons increased the demand for icons, extended their use from tombs and churches to homes and private chapels, and emphasized the nature of direct communication open to all who venerated them. These developments might have taken place in any case; the medium of encaustic lent itself well to portraiture, and the necessary iconography had already been developed in other media, fresco and mosaic. But in Italy, where the technique does not appear to have survived the fall of the Roman Empire, icons were not produced until much later, when Eastern models were copied.⁶⁰ The combination of early Christian practices with the encaustic portrait tradition occurred in the East, and it was in the East that faith in icons continued for many centuries, ignoring the artistic changes and religious upheavals of the Renaissance and Reformation in the West. It went through a series of alterations: the original encaustic technique was replaced by tempera, and the limited number of subjects portrayed on early icons grew to a wider range of imagery. Yet the icon retained a hold on the popular imagination for over a millennium.



Figure 9. Gold coins of Empresses Irene and Theodora, obverse and reverse, of 797–802 and 842–43. Dumbarton Oaks Collection.

This faith in icons had a very long prehistory. All the converts to the new faith were familiar with deeply ingrained customs relating to the care of the dead. In addition, many had worshipped images of deities in human form, personalized gods to whom their prayers had been directed, and practiced an almost instinctive belief in the efficacy of tactile contact with these gods. These traditions were part of the common lifestyle of the entire Mediterranean world, and the early Christians could not avoid or ignore them. From ancient funerary practice and the celebration of its martyrs, the church was predisposed to place confidence in familiar representations of holy persons. Roman portraiture and sculpture, both private and public, and the required veneration of imperial images formed a further step in the development of the early Christian encaustic icon. Pagan and secular skills were adapted, craftsmen inspired by works allegedly made under divine direction, and a new art form emerged in the later fifth or sixth century—the devotional icon.

The flexibility of this Christian medium is revealed in the great variety of functions performed by icons. They were equally suitable

for large-scale images commissioned by rich patrons for the lavish decoration of churches and for small objects made in considerable numbers for a poorer market. They satisfied both public and private needs, serving to rally military forces and to protect beleaguered cities, to introduce an ecclesiastical dignitary to his diocese, to commemorate a miraculous cure, and to facilitate personal prayer. In this final capacity we can see how they became especially significant for women, who were otherwise denied a full communication with the holy. Precisely because the smaller portable icons could be carried on journeys or from one house to another, they could be adapted for a purely domestic use by women. Through their particular qualities they could provide a powerful stimulus to private devotion, a visual aid to Christian worship. The larger, public icons housed in churches and shrines also exercised this capacity, which attracted women and drew them into novel expressions of religiosity. The cult of icons thus grew both from a private and personal commitment, made by individuals and frequently by women, and from an institutional incorporation that recognized the power of the new art form. It was fanned by an imperial desire to control the most ancient and authentic representations of Christ and the Virgin, to house these objects and related relics in Constantinople and thus protect the imperial city.

Icons were therefore elevated to a revered position within the church while they continued to command immense popular devotion, a combination that ensured the cult's survival even through two long and severe bouts of persecution. And by the middle of the ninth century, when the second phase of iconoclasm ended, icon worship was more systematically embedded in the organized ritual of the church and reestablished in the life of the ordinary Christian. The exact role of women in this historic triumph is unsatisfactorily documented. But from their positions on the throne and in the streets of the capital, they clearly played a militant part. Through their control over domestic organization, they inculcated a devotion to icons in children of both sexes, and it seems reasonable to conclude that in the East women were a major force in the preservation and reproduction of faith in icons.

NOTES

This paper owes much to the disagreements and critical points raised by David Freedberg in particular, and by Anthony Barnett, Averil Cameron, and Robin Cormack, all of whom I thank and absolve from any responsibility for the final version. I should also like to acknowledge the assistance of the 1980/81 Fellows and Staff of the Society for the Humanities, Cornell University, and of Francine Wynham and Jon Halliday.

1. This fundamental justification of Christian art is given by Gregory the Great in a letter of October 600, to Serenus, bishop of Marseille; see *PL*, 77, col. 1128C; Eng. trans. J. Marmby, *Selected Epistles of Gregory the Great*, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd ser., ed. P. Schaff and H. Wace, 14 vols. (New York, 1890–1900), vol. 13, p. 53. Serenus had removed all Christian artifacts from his church because of the danger of them being worshipped. Exactly the same grounds were cited by the two Anatolian bishops who initiated the Byzantine outbreak of iconoclasm about 125 years later. **Update** Among the many studies of Pope Gregory's letter, see C. Chazelle, "Pictures, Books, and the Illiterate. Pope Gregory the Great's Letters to Serenus of Marseilles," *Word and Image* 6, no. 2 (1990), 138–53, with copious bibliography; A. Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm* (Chicago, 2000), ch. 4.

2. On the burial customs current in the first century AD, see J.M.C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World* (Ithaca, 1971); J. Jeremias, *Heiligräber in Jesu Umwelt* (Göttingen, 1958); A. D. Nock, "Cremation and Burial in the Roman Empire," in *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, 2 vols., ed. Z. Stewart (Cambridge, MA, 1972), vol. 1, 277–307; A. Rush, *Death and Burial in Christian Antiquity* (Washington, DC, 1941); and in general, F. Cumont, *After Life in Roman Paganism* (New Haven, CT, 1922); L. V. Grinsell, *Barrow, Pyramid and Tomb: Ancient Burial Customs in Egypt, the Mediterranean and the British Isles* (London, 1975). **Update** See papers from "A Symposium on Death and the Afterlife in Byzantium," *DOP* 55 (2002); N. Constans, "Death and Dying in Byzantium," in D. Kreuger, ed., *Byzantine Christianity: A People's History of Christianity*, vol. 3 (Minneapolis, 2006), 124–45.

3. And this belief was not always visibly recorded, leaving no positive Christian identification; see P. A. Février, "A propos du repas funéraire: culte et sociabilité," *Cahiers archéologiques* 26 (1977), 29–45. See also A. D. Nock, "Early Gentile Christianity and Its Hellenistic Background," in *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, vol. 1, 49–133; M. Simon and A. Benoit, *Le Judaïsme et le Christianisme antique* (Paris, 1968); M. Hengel, *Property and Riches in the Early Church: Aspects of a Social History of Early Christianity*, Eng. trans. (London, 1974); H. C. van Eijk, *La résurrection des morts chez les Pères apostoliques* (Paris, 1974).

4. C. H. Kraeling, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos conducted by Yale University and the French Academy of Inscriptions and Letters*, Final Report, VIII, pt. 1, *The Synagogue* (New Haven, CT, 1956); *ibid.*, P.V.C. Baur, *The Paintings in the Christian Chapel*, Fifth Preliminary Report (New Haven, CT, 1934); M. Rostovtzeff, *Dura-Europos and Its Art* (Oxford, 1938). **Update** K. Weitzmann, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art* (Washington, DC, 1990).

5. On the difficulty of distinguishing Christian from heathen art, see the texts quoted in C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1972) (hereafter cited as Mango, *Art*), 18, 40–41; and further later. The gradual decline of ecclesiastical opposition to figural art is traced by E. Kitzinger, "The Cult of the Icons in the Age before Iconoclasm," *DOP* 8 (1953), 83–150; but Sister Charles Murray, "Art and the Early Church," *JTS* N.S. 28 (1977), 303–45, claims that this opposition is much exaggerated; cf. the same author's *Rebirth and Afterlife: A Study of the Transmutation of Some Pagan Imagery in Early Christian Funerary Art* (Oxford, 1981), 13–36. For a helpful reappraisal of the literary evidence, see H. G. Beck, "Von der Fragwürdigkeit der Ikone," *Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philos.-Hist. Klasse*, vol. 7 (Munich, 1975). **Update** Tom Mathews is exploring the ancient roots of Christian icons; see T. F. Mathews, *Byzantium from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York, 1998), esp. 43–52; *idem*, *The Clash of Gods*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, 1999), "The Intimate Icon," 177–90 (a new chapter).

6. P. A. Février, "Le culte des morts dans les communautés chrétiennes durant le IIIe siècle," *Atti del IX congresso internazionale di archeologia cristiana* (Rome, 1977), vol. I, 211–74; J. Pelikan, *The Shape of Death: Life, Death and Immortality in the Early Fathers*, New York, 1962; M. L. Thérel, *Les symboles de l' "Ecclesia" dans la création iconographique de l'art chrétien du IIIe au VIe siècle* (Rome, 1973); A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins* (Princeton, 1968), esp. 60–86.

7. K. Parlasca, *Mummenporträts und verwandte Denkmäler* (Wiesbaden, 1966); H. Zaloscer, *Vom Mumienbildnis zur Ikone* (Wiesbaden, 1969); A. F. Shore, *Portrait Painting from Roman Egypt* (London, 1972); Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 245–81; D.E.E. Kleiner, *Roman Group Portraiture: The Funerary Reliefs of the Late Republic and Early Empire* (New York/London, 1977). H. P. L'Orange, "The Antique Origin of Medieval Portraiture," *Acta Congressus Madvigiani*, Proceedings of the Second International Congress of Classical Studies (Copenhagen, 1954), vol. III, 53–70; reprinted in the author's *Likeness and Icon: Selected Studies in Classical and Mediaeval Art* (Odense, 1973), 91–102. **Update** Euphrosyne Doxiadis, *The Mysterious Fayum Portraits: Faces from Ancient Egypt* (London, 1995); Mathews, as earlier, note 5.

8. A. Grabar, *Martyrium: Recherches sur le culte des reliques de l'art chrétien* (Paris, 1946; repr. London, 1972); H. Delehay, *Les origines du culte des martyrs* (Brussels, 1933; repr. New York, 1980); P. Brown, *The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1981); W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Oxford, 1965). On the belief in St. Peter's powers of intercession, see J.M.C. Toynbee and J. Ward Perkins, *The Shrine of Saint Peter and the Vatican Excavations* (London, 1956), 135–62, 165–67, 170–2; P. Styger, *Die römischen Katakomben* (Berlin, 1933), 341–44; R. Krautheimer, *Rome: Profile of a City*, 312–1308 (Princeton, 1980), 18–20; C. Pietri, *Roma christiana: Recherches sur l'église de Rome ... 311–440*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1976), vol. I, 272–95, 316–48. For the earliest representations of Sts. Peter and Paul, which go back possibly to the second century, see Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 68–71. **Update** R. Ousterhout, ed., *The Blessings of Pilgrimage* (Urbana, IL, 1990); D. Frankfurter, ed., *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt* (Leiden, 1998); the colloquium held at Dumbarton Oaks, *Pilgrimage in the Byzantine Empire, 7th–15th Centuries* is published in *DOP* 56 (2002); *Pèlerinage et lieux saints dans l'Antiquité et le Moyen Âge*, ed. B. Caseau, J.-C. Cheynet, and V. Déroche (Paris 2006).

9. J. Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels* (London, 1971), 158, 160, 162–63, 164–71; Mango, *Art*, 11–14. **Update** M. Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins and Pilgrims: Ascetic Travel in the Mediterranean World, AD 300–800* (University Park, PA, 2005), chapter on Egeria and Jerusalem. On Helena's activity, see L. Brubaker, "Memories of Helena: Patterns in Imperial Female Matronage in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries," in Liz James, *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium* (London, 1997), 52–75.

10. Brown, *The Cult of Saints*, 7–8, 42–43; but note that the practice depended on direct contact with the original tomb.

11. A. Grabar, *Ampoules de Terre Sainte (Monza-Bobbio)* (Paris, 1958); Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*; on the early pilgrims and Christ's relics, cf. J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades* (Warminster, 1977), 35–36. The fact that the shroud was not found and commemorated in the early fourth century has given rise to a host of theories and beliefs; see the recent survey by Averil Cameron, *The Sceptic and the Shroud*, an inaugural lecture, King's College (London, 1980). The hunt for relics was to introduce a new possibility: that of bringing tombs to new cult centers, generally urban; see, for example, the extensive translation of relics to Constantinople, Averil Cameron, "Images of Authority: Elites and Icons in Late Sixth-Century Byzantium," *Past and Present* 84 (1979), 3–35, esp. 18–24. **Update** See the third updated edition of J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims* (Warminster, 1999); C. Metzger, *Les ampoules à eulogie du Musée du Louvre* (Paris, 1981); R. Conti, ed., *Monza, il Duomo e i suoi tesori*

(Milan, 1988); and see the magnificent exhibition catalogue, M. Bagnoli et al., *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics and Devotion in Medieval Europe* (London, 2011), and D. Kreuger, "The Religion of Relics in Late Antiquity and Byzantium," *ibid.*, 5–17, and pilgrim flasks illustrated on 43–44, 115; M.-F. Auzépy, "Les Isauriens et l'espace sacré: l'église et les reliques," in *L'histoire des Iconoclastes*, 341–52; M. Kaplan, "De la dépouille à la relique: formation du culte des saints à Byzance du VI^e au XII^e siècle," in *Les reliques: objets, cultes, symboles*, ed. E. Bozoky and A.-M. Helvetius (Louvain 1999), 19–38; Beat Brenk, *The Apse, the Images and the Icon: An Historical Perspective of the Apse as a Space for Images* (Wiesbaden, 2010), 83–84.

12. St. John Chrysostom, *Homilia encomiastica in Meletium*, in *PG*, 50, cols. 515–16; cf. Mango, *Art*, 39–40.

13. On the cult of St. Symeon and its role in the developing use of icons, see K. Holl, "Der Anteil der Styliten am Aufkommen der Bilderverehrung," *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, vol. II, *Der Osten* (Tübingen, 1928), 388–98; on the Roman craftsmen, Theodoret of Cyr, *Historia Religiosa*, XXVI, in *PG*, vol. 82, cols. 1472D–1473A; cf. Mango, *Art*, 41.

14. *Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai*, ed. T. Preger, in *Scriptores originum Constantinopolitanorum*, ed. T. Preger (Leipzig, 1901), vol. I, para. 10, 25; see now the Eng. trans. and commentary, *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century: The Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, ed. Averil Cameron and Judith Herrin (Leiden, 1984), and cf. Mango, *Art*, 16. The Arians are also alleged to have burned an image of the Virgin and Child. G. Ladner, *I Ritratti dei Papi nell'antichità e nel medioevo* (Vatican City, 1941), vol. I.

15. Theodore Lector, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, I, 15, in *PG*, 86, col. 173A; cf. Mango, *Art*, 40, and Murray, *Rebirth and Afterlife* (as cited in note 5).

16. See, for example, John of Ephesos, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, part III, ch. 29, English translation by R. Payne Smith (Oxford, 1860), 214–15, and the instances cited by Mango, *Art*, 40–41.

17. See the recent discussion in K. Hopkins, "Brother-Sister Marriage in Roman Egypt," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22 (1980), 303–54, esp. 348–51 and 353, where the mummy portraits are tentatively identified as gifts between courting couples. While this hypothesis is unlikely to account for the production of all portraits, for example, plates 2 and 8 of Hopkins's article, their decline seems to be related to the increasing domination of Roman law and Christianity, two forces that introduced novel forms of marriage into Egypt.

18. A. Effenberger, *Koptische Kunst* (Vienna, 1975), 186; H. Zaloscer, *Die Kunst im christlichen Ägypten* (Vienna/Munich, 1974), 118, where the identification of the tombstone with Apa Shenute, who died in 451, is considered possible rather than definite.

19. None of these later portraits have survived, but their existence is clear from epigrams referring to the display of paintings of courtesans, commissioned by admirers; see for instance, Agathias, *Anthologia graeca*, ed. W. R. Paton, vol. 5 (London, 1919), bk. XVI, no. 80, with a pun on the melting heart and the wax composition; cf. Mango, *Art*, 119. The adaptation of encaustic for religious subjects may have been promoted by imperial patronage in Constantinople. Update Mathews suggests a different development directly from portraits of pagan gods to Christian figures; see *Byzantium from Antiquity to the Renaissance* and *The Clash of Gods*, as earlier.

20. Eusebius, *Onomastikon*, ed. E. Klostermann (Leipzig, 1904), Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte, vol. 11; Eusebius *Werke*, vol. III, with Jerome's Latin translation facing. Cf. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, 1–2, 47–52 with extracts from the letter of Jerome to Eustochium.

21. On the discovery, see Mango, *Art*, 34–35; A. Wenger, *L'Assomption de la Très*

Sainte Vierge dans la tradition byzantine du VI^e au X^e siècle (Paris, 1955); and on the cult of the Virgin at Constantinople, Averil Cameron, "The Cult of the Theotokos in Sixth Century Constantinople," *JTS* N.S. 29 (1978), 79–108. **Update** R. Cormack, *Painting the Soul: Icons, Death Masks and Shrouds* (London, 1997).

22. On the Abgar image, see the discussion in Averil Cameron, *The Sceptic and the Shroud* (cited in note 11 earlier), and on the Kamouliana *acheiropoièton*, Mango, *Art*, 114–15. **Update** A. Cameron, "The Mandyliion and Byzantine Iconoclasm," in *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, ed. H. Kessler and G. Wolf (Rome, 1998), 33–54; J. Trilling, "The Image Not Made by Hands—the Byzantine Way of Seeing," in *The Holy Face ...*, 109–28; G. Wolf, "From Mandyliion to Veronica: Picturing the Disembodied Face and Disseminating the Image of Christ in the Latin West," in *The Holy Face ...*, 153–80. L. Brubaker and J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era ca. 680–850: A History* (Cambridge, UK, 2011), 35–38 (stressing that apart from these *acheiropoieta*, relics rather than icons were the objects honored with special veneration), 55–56.

23. Examples of divine guidance in Mango, *Art*, 144–45. On the Panagia Aggeloktistos (made by angels) at Kiti, Cyprus, see N. P. Kondakov, *Ikonoграфиya Bogomateri*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1914), vol. 1, 231–40; A.H.S. Megaw and E.J.W. Hawkins, *The Church of the Panagia Kanikaria at Lythrankomi, Cyprus, Mosaics and Frescoes* (Washington, DC, 1975), esp. 168–69.

24. G. B. Ladner, *Ad Imaginem Dei: The Image of Man in Medieval Art*, Wimmer Lecture XVI, 1962 (Latrobe, PA, 1965).

25. See the instances cited by Patriarch Germanos, PG, vol. 98, col. 185A, and by Bishop Theodore of Myra in 787; *Mansi*, XIII, cols. 33C–D. There are numerous examples in the *Miracles of Saint Artemios*, ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Varia graeca sacra* (St. Petersburg, 1909), also published in *Zapiski istor.-philolog. Fakulteta imperatorskago S. Petersburgskago Universiteta*, vol. 95, (1909), and now translated by V. Crisafulli and J. W. Nesbitt, *The Miracles of St. Artemios* (Leiden/New York, 1997); cf. notes 30 and 39 later.

26. M. Jugie, *La mort et l'assomption de la Sainte Vierge* (Rome, 1944), and Wenger, *L'Assomption de la Très Sainte Vierge* (note 19 earlier). **Update** M. Vassilaki, ed., *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art* (Milan/London, 2000); eadem, ed., *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium* (Aldershot, UK, 2005).

27. On the conversion of St. Mary the Egyptian, see the *Life*, ch. XVI in PL, vol. 75, cols. 682A–C; Alice-Mary Talbot, ed., *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation* (Washington, DC, 1996), 70–94 (trans. by Maria Kouli); and the late sixth-century tradition recorded by the Piacenza pilgrim, Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, 83. On the icon of the Virgin at Sozopolis, see Eustratios, *Life of St. Eutychios*, PG, 86, cols. 2325–28. This same icon was held by Germanos to be responsible for many cures; see PG, vol. 98, cols. 185A–B. **Update** This connection between women and the cult of the Mother of God has been criticized; see A. P. Kazhdan and A.-M. Talbot, "Women and Iconoclasm," *BZ* 44 (1990), 391–408; which was countered by P. Hatlie, "Women and Iconoclasm Reconsidered," *ibid.*, 46 (1992), citing the evidence of St. Theodore of Stoudios. J. Cotsonis, "The Contribution of Lead Seals to the Study of the Cult of Saints (Sixth–Twelfth Century)," *BZ* 75 (2005), 383–497, has shown from the choice of saint depicted on the seal that men appear to be just as devoted to the Mother of God as women. But of course fewer women owned and used seals.

28. Color reproduction in K. Weitzmann, *The Icon: Holy Images—Sixth to Fourteenth Century*, New York, 1978, 48–49, pl. 5. **Update** Robin Cormack has criticized this interpretation of the Turtura fresco, claiming it to be a "solid patriarchal view of the correct moral behavior of women" erected by Turtura's son;

see “Women and Icons, and Women in Icons,” in James, *Women, Men and Eunuchs*, as earlier, 24–51, esp. 33–34. This article directly attacks the idea that women may have felt a particular affinity with the Mother of God. It mistakes my argument about female responses to icons by confusing it with the representation of women in icons, and sharply criticizes the role of women as promoters of the cult of icons. Today I would also stress the domestic context of much icon veneration; see “The Icon Corner in Medieval Byzantium,” [chapter 13](#) in this volume. Brenk, *The Apse, the Image and the Icon* (note 11 earlier), 86–92, emphasizes the private nature of the monument and relates it to other votive images.

29. K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Icons* (Princeton, 1976), vol. I (hereafter, Weitzmann, *Icons*) B3; also reproduced in *The Icon*, 42–43, pl. 2 (see note 26 earlier). **Update** See Cormack, as earlier, 32–33, pointing out that the Virgin does not directly address the viewer—that role is given to the two male saints flanking her throne—and that nothing is known of the production of the icon; idem, “The Eyes of the Mother of God,” in Vassilaki, ed., *Images of the Mother of God*, as earlier, 167–74. These reinforce the viewer’s attention, with the ever-present possibility that the Virgin will turn to address the viewer. Another early encaustic icon preserved at Mount Sinai, the image of St. Peter, is linked to a female donor by Leslie Brubaker; see Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, as earlier, 36–37.

30. *Miracles of Saint Artemios*, no. 34, 51–52; cf. C. Mango, “On the History of the *Templon* and the Martyrion of St. Artemios at Constantinople,” *Zographie* 10 (1979), 40–43, to whom I am indebted for this reference. Another cure effected by St. Artemios through the power of Christ was acknowledged by the invalid’s mother, who gave thanks before an icon of Christ in the same shrine; see *Miracles*, no. 43, 72.

31. M. Krause, “Zur Lokalisierung und Datierung koptischer Denkmäler. Das Tafelbild des Bischofs Abraham,” *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 97 (1971), 106–10. Of course, the reverse may also account for the icon, viz, that it was painted to be displayed in the monastery while Abraham was away as bishop. **Update** Brenk, *The Apse, the Image and the Icon*, 95, suggests that this portrait of Abraham (shown deceased with a halo) was produced by the monks after his death to promote their leader to heaven.

32. *Vie de Théodore de Sykéôn*, ed. and trans. A.-J. Festugière *Subsidia Hagiographica*, 48 (Brussels, 1970), ch. 139; Eng. trans. in E. Dawes and N. H. Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints* (Oxford, 1948), 178; cf. a similar occasion in the *Life* of St. Daniel the Stylite, 12, when a disciple had a portrait painted above the entrance to a chapel; the saint was furious and removed it, determined “not to receive the glory of men,” Dawes and Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints*, 13–14. This fifth-century example reflects a stronger hostility to the veneration of living holy men than Theodore’s in the seventh. J. D. Breckenridge, “Apocrypha of Early Christian Portraiture,” *BZ* 67 (1974), 101–9, cites a similar opposition on the part of Plotinus. This must, however, be seen in the light of general opposition to the commemoration of the living in portraits.

33. G. A. and M. Soteriou, *Ikônes du Mont-Sinai*, 2 vols. (Athens, 1956); Weitzmann, *Icons* (note 27 earlier). **Update** The Sinai icons are being studied more closely; see for example, R. S. Nelson and K. M. Collins, eds., *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground, Icons from Sinai*, exhibition catalogue, Getty Museum (Los Angeles, 2006), with important essays, which replace this analysis.

34. Weitzmann, *Icons*, B5 and B27, respectively. There are about thirty that appear to antedate the onset of iconoclasm in 730. The three Constantinopolitan icons are B1, B3, and B5, of Christ, the Virgin enthroned with saints and angels, and St. Peter.

35. Weitzmann, *Icons*, 8–9; Shore, *Portrait Painting*, 20–25.

36. Zaloscer, *Die Kunst im christlichen Ägypten*, 23–26, 59–69; M. Schapiro, *Words and Pictures: On the Literal and the Symbolic in the Illustration of a Text* (The Hague/Paris, 1973), 38–49, 60, and n. 79. **Update** See also David Morgan, *The Embodied Eye. Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling* (Berkeley, 2012), 73–75, 89–90, on the “icon as a site of interface ... enabling a special kind of visual mediation.”

37. Weitzmann, *Icons*, 13–15, and plates I–II, XXXIX–XLI. **Update** See the entry on the Christ icon in the catalogue of the *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai*, as earlier.

38. Schapiro, *Words and Pictures*, 60; H. Maguire, “Truth and Convention in Byzantine Descriptions of Works of Art,” *DOP* 28 (1974), 133–34; cf. Agathias’s description of the eyes of an image of St. Michael, Mango, *Art*, 115.

39. Examples of these votive images were cited at the Council of Nicaea in 787, to demonstrate divine approval of such practices; see *Mansi*, vol. XIII, cols 68A–D, 73C–76C. On the use of an icon of Saint Artemios; see the *Miracles*, no. 31, 44–45 (as cited in note 25 earlier). **Update** Marie-France Auzépy, “L’iconodoulie, défense de l’image ou de la dévotion à l’image?” in *Nicée II 787–1987: Douze siècles d’images religieuses*, ed. F. Boespflug and N. Lossky (Paris, 1987), 157–65, reprinted in *L’histoire des iconoclastes* (Paris 2007), 37–44.

40. *Mansi*, vol. XIII, col. 65; Mango, *Art*, 138–39. **Update** See Brenk, *The Apse, the Image and the Icon* (note 12 earlier), 98–99, with particular stress on the private veneration of icons of saints, which were also carried on journeys for protection.

41. Weitzmann, *Icons*, 38–40 (on this icon; cf. 31 for another lidded one); *Mansi*, vol. XIII, cols. 32C–33C.; Mango, *Art*, 40.

42. I do not include Irene the Khazar, wife of Constantine V, although she is counted among iconophile empresses by Theophanes; see *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1883) (hereafter *Theophanes*), vol. I. 409–10; Eng. trans., *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, ed. Cyril Mango and Roger Scott (Oxford, 1997); cf. *Nicephori opuscula historica*, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1880) (hereafter *Nikephoros*), 58, 59; Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Short History*, Eng. trans. Cyril Mango (Washington, DC, 1990). She must have been a young girl at the time of her marriage (Constantine was only twelve years old) and undoubtedly received instruction according to the new iconoclast theology (Leo III had just dismissed his iconophile patriarch and instituted the official destruction of icons), and she was probably kept under strict control in the imperial palace until the consummation of the alliance (her son Leo was not born until 749 and was raised as an iconoclast). So it seems extremely unlikely that Irene “maintained the true faith” (iconophilism). Cf. S. Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Constantine V with Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources*, *CSCO*, 384, Subsidia 52 (Louvain, 1977), 13, 22. **Update** On these empresses, see now Judith Herrin, *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium* (Princeton/London, 2001).

43. *Theophanes*, vol. I, 444–45; *Nikephoros*, 77. From the fact that Irene was born in Greece, many historians have concluded that the whole Balkan peninsula was devoted to the cult of icons and that iconoclasm had no effects there. To generalize in this way from one isolated example seems quite unsafe; in addition, it is highly unlikely that the fervent iconoclast Constantine V would have permitted his eldest son, Leo, to marry an iconophile. A much more probable explanation is to be sought in the suitability of the alliance that Irene brought to Constantinople. Central Greece was not an area firmly controlled by the capital, and Irene’s family, the Serantapychos, was obviously an influential one. On this, see the fascinating survey by P. Speck, *Kaiser Konstantin VI: Die Legitimation einer fremden und den Versuch einer eigenen Herrschaft*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1978), app. III, vol. I, 405–19; vol. II, 821–30. **Update** Irene’s role is further examined in my study, *Women in Purple* (as earlier).

44. Symeon the Logothete, *Chronographia*, 624; George the Monk, *Vitae*

imperatorum recentiorum, 789–90; cf. Theophanes Continuatus, 89; all three in I. Bekker, ed., *CSHB*, vol. 45 (Bonn, 1838). For a useful discussion of the source material and the chronology; see W. T. Treadgold, “The Problem of the Marriage of the Emperor Theophilus,” *GRBS* 16 (1975), 325–41.

45. Symeon the Logothete, 629–30; Theophanes Continuatus, 91–92 (both as cited earlier, note 44). **Update** See Herrin, *Women in Purple*, as earlier.

46. On Euphrosyne, who was the second wife of Michael II and stepmother of Theophilus, see *Josephi Genesisii: Regnum Libri Quattuor*, ed. H. Lesmueller and I. Thurn (Berlin/New York, 1978), 35; Symeon the Logothete, 628–29; Theophanes Continuatus, 78–79, 86, 89–90 (where Theodora’s mother, Theoktiste, is confused with Euphrosyne); and Treadgold, “The Problem of the Marriage of the Emperor Theophilus.” **Update** Euphrosyne is the central figure in *Women in Purple*, as earlier.

47. J. Gouillard, “Le Synodikon de l’Orthodoxie. Edition et Commentaire,” *TM* 2 (1967), 1–316, esp. 119–38, 160–82. **Update** While Theodora’s role is questioned by many, for example, Cormack, it seems unlikely that her previously iconoclast adviser Theoktistos would have taken this initiative; see Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 447–52. His support for her policy was very important, however; see P. Karlin-Hayter, “Icon Veneration: Significance of the Restoration of Orthodoxy?,” in Claudia Sode and Sarolta Takács, eds., *Novum Millennium, Studies on Byzantine History and Culture Dedicated to Paul Speck* (Aldershot, UK, 2001), 171–84, esp. 173, 180–81.

48. PG, 100, cols. 1076B–1076D, 1080A; see the new edition by Marie-France Auzépy, *La Vie d’Étienne le Jeune par Étienne le diacre: Introduction, Edition et Traduction* (Birmingham, 1997), and A.-M. Talbot, *Byzantine Defenders of Images: Eight Saints’ Lives in English Translation* (Washington, DC, 1998). Later in the *Life* of St. Stephen the destruction of this icon is recorded together with Constantine V’s redecoration of the church, *ibid.*, col. 1120C. But the fame of the icon was such that in the eleventh century an encaustic painting of the Virgin found at Blachernai was immediately identified as the same one; see Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 112; note 5 earlier. Other icons survived iconoclast attacks through divine protection, for example, the mosaic icon of Patriarch Germanos, or the relics of St. Euphemia; some were undoubtedly protected by being covered up—the mosaic decoration at the church of Hosios David in Thessalonike is a well-known example. The destruction of figural representation in the capital appears to have been quite thorough: until the archeological discovery of the Kalenderhane mosaic of the Presentation in the Temple, no pre-iconoclast iconic decoration had been found. **Update** C. L. Striker and D. Kuban, *Kalenderhane Camii: Final Reports*, 2 vols. (Mainz, 1997–2007). On the apse mosaic at Hosios David, see now C. Stephan-Kaissis, “Zwei byzantinische Damen und das Gottesbild des Klosters Latomou in Thessaloniki: Neues zum Mosaik von Hosios David und der Ikone von Poganovo,” *He gynaike sto Byzantion: latreia kai techne*, ed. M. Panagiotide-Kesisoglou (Athens, 2012), 87–105.

49. PG, 99, cols. 883–902; about twenty women feature in his two published volumes of correspondence, *ibid.*, cols. 903–1607; cf. A. Mai, *Novae Patrum Bibliothecae*, ed. J. Cozza-Luzi, 8 vols. (Rome, 1844–71), vol. III, 1–244; J. Gouillard, “La femme de qualité dans l’oeuvre de Théodore Stoudite,” *JÖB* 31, no. 3 (1984). **Update** P. Speck pointed out that there was nothing very iconophile about Theodore’s *enkomion*, which conforms to the genre, but there is no doubt about the commitment of the women whom he praises specifically for their dedication, courage, and support. The text is translated by Anthony Kaldellis, *Mothers and Sons, Fathers and Daughters: The Byzantine Family of Michael Psellos* (South Bend, IN, 2006).

50. PG, 105, cols. 901 A–901B. **Update** Brigitte Pitarakis, “Female Piety in Context: Understanding Developments in Private Devotional Practices,” in Vassilaki, ed., *Images of the Mother of God*, 153–66.

51. PG, 100, col. 1085G. This detail is omitted in Theophanes' account, *Theophanes*, vol. 1, 405, and further elaborated in the probably spurious letter to Leo III, attributed to Pope Gregory II; see J. Gouillard, "Aux origines de l'iconoclasme: le témoignage de Grégoire II?" *TM* 3 (1968), 243–307, esp. 293, lines 218–25. Here the icon is identified as one of Christ called Antiphonites, which was in the Chalkoprateia; the women are held responsible for the death of an officer, a *spatharokandidatos*, called Julian. **Update** Many commentators have pointed out the mythical elements in this account, which may be dismissed as iconophile propaganda; see M.-F. Auzépy, "La destruction de l'icône du Christ de la Chalcé par Léon III: propagande ou réalité," *B* 60 (1990), reprinted in *L'histoire des iconoclastes*, as earlier, 145–78.

52. PG, 100, cols. 1085C–1085D; cf. *Theophanes*, vol. I, 409, where the first record of Leo III's violent persecution of iconophiles is connected with his dismissal of Patriarch Germanos in January 730. Stephen the Deacon, author of the *Life*, has conflated the two incidents of 726 and 730 in fact, for he places the removal of the Christ icon and subsequent martyrdom of the women of Constantinople in the year when Anastasios was patriarch, that is, after January 730. The reason for this muddle is probably Stephen's desire to give greater honor to Patriarch Germanos, whose lack of protest over the 726 event was considered shameful by later iconophiles; see G. L. Huxley, "On the *Vita* of S. Stephen the Younger," *GRBS* 18 (1977), 97–108; M.-F. Rouan, "Une lecture 'Iconoclaste' de la Vie d'Etienne le Jeune," *TM* 8 (1981), 415–36. **Update** See now Auzépy, *La Vie d'Etienne le Jeune* (as earlier); and eadem, *L'histoire des iconoclastes*, as earlier. While Paul Speck identified many interpolations in the *acta* of 787 and other iconophile texts, his efforts to prove widescale forgery have been doubted; see Speck, "Wunderheilige und Bilder. Zur Frage des Beginns der Bilderverehrung," in *Poikila Byzantina*, vol. 11 (Berlin, 1991), and the comments of Brenk, *The Apse, the Image and the Icon*, 96–97, and 100, where the widespread use of miraculous icons of saints from the fifth century is emphasized.

53. PG, 100, col. 1164A. **Update** Now available in the edition by Auzépy, as earlier.

54. On the changing position of women in Byzantium, see my study, "De Veranderigen in de positie van vrouwen in het Byzantijnse Rijk," *Jaarboek voor vrouwengeschiedenis*, 1980, 141–60; J. Beaucamp, "La situation juridique de la femme à Byzance," *CahCM* 20 (1977), 145–76; J. Grosdidier de Matons, "La femme dans l'empire byzantin," in P. Grimal, ed., *Histoire mondiale de la femme*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1974), vol. III, 11–43. A. Laiou, "The Role of Women in Byzantine Society," *XVI Internationaler Byzantinistenkongress*, I, no. 1, Vienna, 233–60, *JÖB* 31, no. 1 (1981). **Update** Sharon Gerstel, "Painted Sources for Female Piety in Medieval Byzantium," *DOP* 52 (1998), 89–103; R. F. Taft, "Women at Church in Byzantium: Where, When, and Why?," in *ibid.*, 27–87, demonstrating that women were not always confined to the galleries. For the much later incorporation of icons into the liturgy, see Nancy P. Ševčenko, "Icons in the Liturgy," *DOP* 45 (1991), 45–57, esp. 47, stressing the "gray area between the liturgical and the private use of icons." See also Judith Herrin, "In Search of Byzantine Women: Three Avenues of Approach," [chapter 2](#) in this volume.

55. Judith Herrin, "Women and the Church in Byzantium," *Bulletin of the British Association of Orientalists* 11 (1980), 8–14. E. A. Clark " 'Humble Leadership': A Conflict of Values in Early Women's Monasticism," and D. Abrahamse, "Women's Monasteries in the Middle Byzantine Period," two papers prepared for the Seventh Byzantine Studies Conference (Boston, November 1981), later published in *BF* 9 (1985), 17–34 and 35–58. I am grateful to both authors for permission to read these texts.

56. See the categorical statement by Germanos cited in note 25 earlier. **Update** I have always stressed this aspect of iconophile devotion and continue to find more support for both male and female forms. The key issue is that women had almost no recognized roles within the patriarchal control of the church; see Taft, “Women in Church,” as earlier, 63–70, on the position of deaconess.

57. Irene is certainly one of the most striking personalities of the eighth century and her proposed second marriage to Charlemagne one of the greatest might-have-beens of early medieval history, but of her personal beliefs we remain ignorant; see Speck, *Kaiser Konstantin V*, vol. I, 323–88; vol. II, 733–813. **Update** W. Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival, 780–842* (Stanford, 1988), 5, cites the twelfth-century historian Kedrenos as evidence for Irene’s iconophile commitment. Although no earlier historian makes the claim, Kedrenos states that Constantine V forced her to swear an oath that she would never venerate icons again, before her marriage to Prince Leo, later Leo IV, could be celebrated. I suggest that this is Kedrenos’s explanation for something that he could not understand; see the introduction to this chapter and “Unrivalled Influence: Mothers and Daughters in the Medieval Greek World,” [chapter 4](#) in this volume.

58. On Irene’s artistic patronage, see R. Cormack, “The Arts during the Age of Iconoclasm,” in *Iconoclasm*, ed. A. Bryer and J. Herrin, Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham (Birmingham, 1977), 35–44. **Update** Judith Herrin, “Political Power and Christian Faith in Byzantium: The Case of Irene (Regent 780–90, Emperor 797–802),” [chapter 8](#) in this volume.

59. Speck, *Kaiser Konstantin VI*, vol. I, 283–321, vol. II, 705–31.

60. On the early medieval encaustic icons in Rome, some of which seem to have been introduced by Eastern popes, see Krautheimer, *Rome: Profile of a City* (note 8 earlier) 91, 100–105. In some respects relics served as the Western equivalent of icons; see P. Brown, *The Cult of Saints*, and A. Grabar, *Martyrium*, vol. II, 343–57, on the close relationship between relics and icons (both cited in note 7 earlier). **Update** Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 32–40, emphasize the importance of relics in the East, as more significant than icons before 680, which Brubaker identifies as the “Tipping Point”; see “Icons and Iconomachy,” in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (Oxford, 2010), 323–37, esp. 326–27. See also P. Amato, *De vera effigie Mariae: antiche icone romane* (Milan/Rome, 1988); B. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park, PA, 2006). These studies fail to appreciate the unwritten, personal form of dedication inspired by the private use of icons; see Brenk, *The Apse, the Image and the Icon*, 64–74, 88–92, 107.

MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS IN THE MEDIEVAL GREEK WORLD



Susan Ashbrook Harvey introduced me to this intriguing topic in 1989 in her examination of some *Lives* of Syrian saints that document relations between mothers and daughters. And once I started to read with her conclusions in mind, I was struck by the number of Late Antique and Byzantine mothers and daughters whose family relations could be reconstructed. This is a work in progress, and I would like to thank audiences in North Carolina, St. Andrews, Aix-en-Provence, and Paris, who prompted further questions and helped to expand certain aspects.

Nearly all the written sources that record mothers and daughters in close relations were written by men, who had their own agendas and were often obliged to conform to the expectations of the genre they employed. Deconstructing their accounts often leads to a hollow center of unreal women set up in the minds of frequently celibate men with little or no lived experience of marriage and procreation. Naturally, their constructs are unconvincing and cannot be used as evidence of how women actually lived. Yet in a few almost autobiographical works, Peter Hatlie has shown how authors use mothers to establish their own status in a self-fashioning process and reveal certain tropes about maternal roles. Their writings were often designed to inspire an audience to a particular response—for example, sermons designed to encourage greater charitable giving, or deeper devotion to the Mother of God—and revealed in passing how mothers should guide their children. *Lives* of saints might also have a significant if unstated aim in the need to establish a cult around the shrine of the hero/heroine. Authors must have considered the best way to enhance the audience's response, and their calculations may have included casual relations about daily life, social realities.

These references to everyday existence may not be the same as “authenticating details,” condemned by theorists as a trap to induce readers to accept “an illusory reality” within the narrative. If the male author/speaker wished to incite devotion to a local saint among local people, the distortion of established issues, family background, or notable miracles would not be functional. As Kaldellis put it: “Most of this information is banal and ... does not distinguish Byzantium from other premodern Mediterranean societies. But it is a start.” It is my starting point and it has proved most rewarding, but there is still a long way to go.

IN AN IDYLIC SCENE of devoted mother and obedient daughter created by the poet Claudian, the young girl sits with her mother, drinking in her words, learning from her example, imitating her model behavior. Serena, the mother, is described as teaching her daughter Maria the old songs of Homer, Orpheus, and Sappho. Into this imaginary setting Venus suddenly arrives to announce that Maria is to marry the young emperor, Honorius—for this is a wedding speech that conforms to the Late Antique genre of the *epithalamion*.¹ All the more reason to discount the construct designed to flatter the young couple and their parents. Yet there is one final detail: Claudian adds that this type of

maternal instruction reflected a long tradition, just as “Latona taught Diana and even so gentle Mnemosyne ... gave instruction to meek Thalia.” Putting the empress into the same category as the goddesses was a fitting way to praise Serena, yet it also seems to reveal an assumption, namely, that mothers naturally teach their daughters. In this respect the poet may reveal something valid about the inter-generational relationships of women.

Nonetheless, this fourth-century fictive image encapsulates some of the problems of studying women of the distant past: records about women were mostly written by men and conform to their ideas rather than presenting what their female subjects thought. Womanly stereotypes abound, elegantly illustrated to suit the occasion but empty of character or voice, producing uncomfortable tensions in modern readers. Male authors are responsible for set pieces of rhetoric, written to celebrate a very public event in which men played the major roles, as fathers of the young couple and negotiators of the marriage alliance. In this case Maria was barely twelve years old and Honorius only fourteen, and they had no say in the arrangement, so it’s hardly surprising that we gain no impression of their reactions, or of Serena’s. Claudian was addressing a courtly audience who expected an elaborate entertainment that met the rules of speeches to celebrate marriages, in a medium used by men to mark their status within the imperial court.

So we are left with the surviving male-authored texts about women, young and old, with their presuppositions of appropriate female behavior and unacceptable activity. Any investigation of mothers and daughters is further restricted by the type of evidence that survives. In the early Byzantine period papyri from Egypt record letters and family business accounts that have not survived from other regions, which show how actively involved women were in trading networks. Late Antique tombstones raised by wives to commemorate their deceased husbands sometimes appear to provide a genuine record of deep affection, but these monuments also conform to established traditions. From the early medieval centuries saints’ lives and chronicles provide sparse records, and only from the eleventh century does more evidence (charters, legal records, poems) hint at family histories. Letters, diaries, and novels by women, which often contain more direct evidence of their personal emotions, are almost entirely lacking from the Byzantine period. Even in the Palaiologan era, 1261–1453, nothing like the coroners’ records from fourteenth-century England survive. Equivalent reports were probably made, but most documentation has been lost. So analysis of the relations between mothers and daughters in Byzantium has to patch evidence together from a great variety of sources of different dates, and must proceed

within the framework imposed by social constraints such as childbearing.

All girls were normally obliged to follow their physical role and become mothers, who in turn prepared their own children for adult life. In eras before reliable female contraception, biology is destiny. While this basic function must inform any analysis of how women lived, it coexisted with an alternative offered by the medieval church that permitted some young women to avoid marriage as a dedicated nun, and encouraged widows to refuse remarriage. In both spheres strong emotional links are often observed, for instance, between widowed mothers and their daughters in hagiographic records. Among working women in cities these could be expressed in ceremonies such as the feast of Agathe; and in female monastic communities, where mothers and daughters would experience a sense of female authority that was enhanced by the composition of hymns chanted by the nuns in honor of the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary. In addition to blood relations within the same family, others were formed through adoptive or spiritual connections that could be just as powerful.²

Behind these intergenerational relations lies the fundamental issue of mothering, a problem barely addressed by the sources, except in the idealized fashion demonstrated by Claudian.³ Recent work, however, has examined the process of mothering in the Middle Ages using chiefly Western sources, which can be used as a comparative mirror to Byzantium.⁴ In her extended critique of Caroline Walker Bynum's *Holy Fast, Holy Feast*, Kathleen Biddick challenged Bynum's use of the maternal as a natural referent for the history of medieval women.⁵ She pointed out that many female mystics did not behave in what would be recognized as a maternal fashion, an argument confirmed by early Christian and Byzantine sources that describe mothers abandoning their children and families to enter monasteries or pursue their own spiritual development.⁶ Yet nearly all this evidence comes from male authors, who have their own agendas about the correct behavior of women and mothers. When they record how mothers relate differently to sons and daughters, for instance, they display an overall prejudice against women that makes their testimony suspect.⁷ Specific evidence for maternal support for their daughters is not lacking, however, as Albina, mother of the younger Melania, shows.⁸ But even Perpetua's record of her imprisonment and martyrdom, which purports to document a female voice, may have been subtly altered by the male scribe who edited her account. Nonetheless, her account reflects the intensity of female devotion to local martyrs in the still pagan city of Carthage.⁹

Further, in most medieval documents Christian ideology obscures rivalries between parents and siblings to promote a norm of mutually

beneficial relations. Yet in the context of Christian conversion, Peter Brown remarks, “the bonding between women and children, whether as mother, nurse or wetnurse made women more responsible ... for the health of children and hence for supernatural remedies that might be applied when they fell ill.”¹⁰ And in the Byzantine centuries, the obvious prominence of mothers in training their children, and specifically their daughters, to sustain the larger family, to transmit understanding of the achievements of past generations and commemorate them, was recognized as “women’s work.”¹¹ Even Claudian thought that goddesses and the muses taught their daughters and thus provided a model for mortal mothers. Maternal activity, however, especially among non-elite families, usually goes unacknowledged until children fail to perform in the expected manner, and then mothers can be blamed.

Such gaps challenge readers today to analyze the evidence for mothering and for the influence of mothers and daughters. My aim in this chapter is to survey the pattern of the female life cycle that defined most possibilities for women in Byzantium, and to explore elements of maternal education, together with the alternative that allowed women to opt out of procreation by dedicating themselves to Christ.

THE FEMALE LIFE CYCLE

The unavoidable framework of women’s lives put many of them at risk, since childbirth was dangerous. If deaths are noted in numerous cases of empresses and their newborn children who did not survive complicated deliveries, the same must also have been common among the poor. Funerary monuments, epigrams, icons, and letters of consolation confirm the distress caused by a child’s death.¹² The early years up to age five were particularly dangerous. Thereafter, childhood like other distinct stages of life was marked by outward signs and a specific vocabulary: there were particular terms for the baby (aged 3–7), the child (aged 7–12/14), and juveniles (older than 12/14 who gained their official adult status at age 25).¹³ For girls, greater seclusion from the age of twelve marked their passage at puberty to marriageable age, and is reflected in a prayer for their first veils preserved in the Barberini Euchologion. Marie-France Auzépy has drawn attention to the equivalent prayer for boys, which is associated with cutting the hair of the first beard.¹⁴ Within the female biological prison, the age of menarche marks the boundary between youth and adult life, between being a daughter and becoming a wife, or insisting on a spiritual marriage to Christ.¹⁵ Early marriage followed

by child bearing as soon as possible was the norm for girls. Women beyond child-bearing age often became grandmothers while still relatively young and might take on different roles in educating their younger relations.

Within the fixed stages of female existence, it's clear that the life cycle could become very compressed. If a young girl was married at twelve and had her first child at fourteen, that child would be of an age to be betrothed when the mother was twenty-one and married when the mother was twenty-six. Her first grandchild might be born when she was under thirty. The generations could thus be squashed together uncomfortably closely, probably with several living together in cramped quarters. And mothers and their older daughters might not be so far apart in age. But of course death also came early, with life expectancy averaging out at thirty-five, women usually dying earlier than men because of the dangers of childbirth.¹⁶ This meant that girls grew up very quickly, they were often widowed quite young and might be remarried by their male relatives. In difficult circumstances they could be sent back to their natal families. If they were unable to find a new husband, they might become destitute, as it was very hard for women with children to support a family without a male earner. Stories of desperate widows reflect economic reality.¹⁷ Young teenage mothers also needed maternal help in raising children, sometimes from substitutes like their mothers-in-law, grandmothers, stepmothers, nurses, and elderly slaves, the gray-haired figures who feature prominently in households.

The dominance of the life cycle in women's existence is graphically illustrated by the epigrams collected in garlands or cycles of the *Greek Anthology*, that range from the Hellenistic period to the sixth century AD. Although only the latest ones date from Late Antiquity, their observations seem relevant to medieval Byzantium as well, especially in the urban centers of the empire. Each stage was associated with particular forms of dress and hairstyle, implied in an interesting epigram by the sixth-century author Agathias that reflects the transition from young girl to wife and from wife to the mother of children.¹⁸ The author comments on the decoration of a bride, whose special headdress, *kredemnon*, identifies her important move to the status of wife. Once she becomes a mother her husband will get her a silver headband *argyphēē anadesmen*, decorated with precious stones, which she can weave into her hair. These changes of head covering and hairstyle may be markers of female status. It was certainly common for women to cover their heads when they left the home, but there was no tradition of strict veiling. The male poets also reflect on the lives of unmarried girls: some confined to their homes by protective parents who employ elderly nurses to sleep beside them

(Agathias, book V, 297, 294); others secretly developing furtive love glances which avoid the all-entrapping eyes of guardians (V, 106, 219); yet others kept under stricter control by the gray-haired hag who slaps them if they take even a tiny glance at a man (V, 262, 289).

MARRIAGE

Most girls found it difficult to resist their parents' arrangements for marriage alliances, which could by law take place when they reached the age of twelve. Not that it was clear that the legal age of marriage always corresponded to menarche. At twelve a girl might not yet be menstruating; in fact, depending on her diet, family history, and physical development it might take several more years for her to reach menarche. But following the commonly received idea, she could be married at the age of twelve and sent to live with her in-laws, whether she was fertile or not. This is borne out by the frequent delay between such marriages and the birth of the first child (as is the case with Theophano, who married Otto II in 972 and did not have her first child until 975. Subsequently she gave birth in 977, 978, 979, and in 980 to twins, one of whom did not survive, which corresponds to the "normal" pattern of procreation in medieval societies; see the discussion in "Theophano: Considerations on the Education of a Byzantine Princess," [chapter 11](#) in this volume). Because of this physical stage in a girl's development, it also became the point at which she could try to refuse marriage and devote herself to a celibate life.¹⁹

A distinctly different situation was created when parents decided in advance not to marry their daughter but to dedicate her to the celibate life. This could be an economic decision based on the family's resources and the inability to provide every girl with a dowry, though it might be motivated by a deep Christian piety. It may also be obscured by the practice of sending children as young as three to be educated in monasteries, for example, in case of orphans whose distant relatives did not want to take them in.²⁰ Although St. Basil condemns those parents who force their daughters into celibacy, he insists that children must be allowed to make their own decision about taking vows of permanent celibacy, and not before the age of sixteen or seventeen. Yet most daughters would have been married before that age.

When important family alliances had to be organized, children as young as seven years old could be betrothed, and the girl might then go and live with her future husband and parents-in-law. Anna Komnene gives her a very positive description of her early life with

young Constantine Doukas, under the watchful eye of his mother Maria/Marta of Alania, whom she adored.²¹ While betrothal might not be followed by such a move in less exalted families, the parents of the future bride paid close attention to her development and the marriage ceremony took place as soon as she menstruated. Since the purpose of marriage was children, she was expected to conceive and bear a child as soon as possible, and would then continue, if she was lucky, to produce a large family. The misfortune of parents whose children died young and of women who had no sons was recognized, and large families with many daughters are well documented at all levels of society. Theophilos and Theodora lost one son and had five daughters before Michael III was born; Constantine VII and Helena had five daughters and one son, Romanos. Once their daughters came of age most parents were anxious to arrange advantageous marriages for them. In the eleventh century Eustathios Romaios recalled a situation that he often observed in the courts of justice in the capital: parents wanted to arrange the marriage of their children at younger and younger ages, even below the legal age of seven.²² This was especially marked in the case of only children. He asked himself why this should be and answered that in many cases fathers died before their child was old enough to be married and so they pressed for these early arrangements.²³ That is, he gave a demographic reason for the phenomenon that he had noted. Now if this had become a familiar situation, it's obvious that there must also have been many women who had become widows before their children's marriages had been settled. And indeed, Eustathios drew attention to the anxiety of one grandmother who had made such arrangements when her grandchild was very young, but which the partners did not want to honor when they came of age.²⁴ Such conflicts may have been common.

Parents also tried to ensure that their daughters had every opportunity of finding a suitably high-ranking husband, even possibly the young Byzantine prince himself. This strategy might be attempted through an introduction to the imperial court in Constantinople, and appears to have been used by the parents of young girls who were considered especially beautiful.²⁵ The imperial official Stylianos Zaoutzes brought his daughter Zoe into the palace, where she captivated Leo VI, and Constantine IX was attracted to the young hostage from Alania, after the death of his mistress Maria Skleraina. At court there was always a place for girls, as the joke attributed to the jester Chaliboures makes clear. While the emperor's concubines and kinswomen danced at a banquet, the emperor demanded the salt (*hales*), and Chaliboures replied "Let's get to know these first and then send for others (*alles*)."²⁶ Andronikos I Komnenos also went out for picnics accompanied by dancing girls and flute-players.²⁷ Young

women might find work looking after the female baths inside the palace, maintaining the large wardrobe of official costumes, or serving as lady in waiting, *koubikoularia*, to the empress. It was in this capacity that Theodote, a relation of Platon and Theodore of the Stoudios monastery, seems to have attracted Constantine VI even before he had disposed of his wife, Maria of Amnia.²⁸

THE “BRIDE SHOWS”

While this method of breaking into the highest circles of Byzantine society was clearly very limited, during the late eighth and ninth centuries all provincial families could cherish the same ambition through the procedure characterized as the “bride show.”²⁹ This is presented in the sources as a way of finding the most attractive young woman in the empire to become the wife of the future emperor. Even if the basic outline hides a more complicated process, the parents of suitable young girls dreamed of the triumph of their daughter in such a contest, which would promote her to the highest point of Byzantine society. Whatever the truth behind them, it’s clear that the mother of a potential young bride might play a crucial role in preparing her for the contest. Similarly, on the imperial side, the mother, stepmother, or grandmother of the young prince took a major role in the staging of such events.

In the case of Maria of Amnia court officials arrived in Paphlagonia in search of candidates and were entertained by Philaretos.³⁰ They were charmed by his three granddaughters, introduced to them by Hypatia, their mother. She accompanied them back to Constantinople together with a dozen other candidates who were to be judged in the contest. At the presentation at court Maria was immediately selected as the winner and was married to Constantine VI shortly after, amid great celebrations. Her two sisters were also given in marriage to prestigious husbands, and her grandparents, Philaretos and Theosebo, were entertained at court and housed in a splendid palace. Although Hypatia is not mentioned again after her presentation of her daughters, it seems very likely that she remained in the capital living close to them. Several members of the family were later buried in the women’s monastery of St. Andrew *en Krisi* in Constantinople.³¹

Even if this account of one of the beauty contests was written with an entirely different aim, it’s impossible to deny the key role played by the mothers, both anxious about the future of their children. Empress Irene was determined to find a bride for her son among a family that would be useful to her own projects; Hypatia was concerned to promote her three daughters to a better future than life

in rural Paphlagonia, where her father had greatly reduced their resources by his prodigious philanthropy.

Once married and established as mistress of her own household, or a married member of a multigenerational household, women sometimes had a little more freedom to go out alone and to meet their friends. According to the Late Antique authors of epigrams, some of these young wives often complained of their husbands who mistreat them (V, 43); one had to fight off adulterous intentions by threatening to set the dog on him (V, 242); others took lovers because they didn't like their husbands (V, 41). But for all of them, maternity is their function and their fate. As soon as they give birth a new stage in their lives begins and they have to work at the business of raising children.

MATERNITY

As Clarissa Atkinson has observed: "Maternity is an idea and a social institution as well as a personal reality, and women who bring up children necessarily participate in maternity as it is defined and understood in their own society."³² Of course, men do most of the defining in medieval societies, and Byzantium is no exception to this. Descriptions of proper maternity are found in the laws, in customs, narrative sources, social practices, and indirect hints, which provide evidence of what the Byzantines accepted as good or bad maternal behavior. Elite men also recorded their debts to their mothers, whom they characterize as most pious and also good teachers. But since men constructed maternity according to their own perceptions, it's difficult to identify any particular maternal ways of raising children in Byzantium.

"Normal" families, that is, ones in which wives bore a child roughly every other year, rarely provoked comment from Byzantine historians, because maternity was the essential task of women. Yet those who failed to produce children, or had only one child, were often noted. The importance of sons was critical for empresses, because it was hoped that a male child would continue his father's rule and extend the dynasty. When Irene's son Constantine was born, she could celebrate a great success. But she had no further births during the remaining nine years of her marriage to her husband Leo IV (771–80). There is no contemporary comment on this fact, which may have been due to a medical reason. In the twelfth century the historian Kedrenos made sense of it by assuming that Leo had become estranged from his wife because of her devotion to icons, and therefore decided not to sleep with her.³³ This explanation, based on a reconstruction of Irene's life as a devoted iconophile, is quite unconvincing, as contemporary

sources do not record that she manifested any disloyalty to Leo's iconoclast policy. Other possible explanations for her inability to bear further children could derive from complications at her first delivery, or from a genetic problem that meant that the couple were incompatible. In these circumstances, after the first birth she would be unable to carry any conceptions to term, and would suffer persistent miscarriages or stillbirths. Thanks to helpful medical experts I was reminded that this condition persists to this day, restricting some couples to only one chance at procreation.

Despite all these limiting factors, many Byzantine authors comment on the pleasure of having children even if they were reticent about expressing subjective feelings. Accounts of the distressing experience of the death of children are not all rhetorically uniform monodies, and Psellos wrote about the short life of his adopted daughter Styliane with considerable emotion. In the last section of the *Life of Philaretos*, the author Niketas recalls that as a young child he frequently sat on his grandfather's knee and was lifted up to ride in front of him on his horse. And many saints record the devotion of their parents and inspiration of other relations who helped them to develop their holy tendencies.³⁴

OLD AGE

Once they had raised their children, well-off mothers might find more time for their grandchildren, their religious observance, or other activities, while those obliged to work would continue to do so. Some measure of support for the elderly is clear from the numbers of children who lived with their parents and looked after them. Old people who were childless might adopt an heir, making it a condition that the adopted child would care for the parent in his or her old age. Others sought a refuge in monasteries, which maintained traditions of Christian attention to their needs. Special old age homes, *gerokomeia* or *gerotropheia*, often attached to monastic centers provided homes for a few. But for the majority of elderly people, assistance was family based.³⁵ With age widows might attain a greater degree of authority; they are often found as heads of households in tax records and might even identify their male relatives, as Leonora Neville has recently demonstrated.³⁶

The elderly were respected in Byzantium because with age came experience and wisdom that could be passed on to younger generations. In the early Christian period widows who refused to remarry could derive authority from their loyalty to one husband; from their experience they could "teach younger women to be sober,

to love their husbands and their children.”³⁷ Gray hair is of course the marker of age (*he graus he trikoronos, graus he phthonere*) as the poets of the *Greek Anthology* call them, (V, 289, 294, cf. 106), and grandmothers who watch carefully over younger girls are both praised and blamed by young men who wish to seduce virgins. While some recognize the 10,000 graces of the 60-year-old Charito, who still preserved the mass of her dark hair, the marble cones of her firm bosom and her unwrinkled skin (V, 13, cf. Philinna; V, 258, Melite; V, 282), others have no time for elderly prostitutes (V, 76, 204) with graying hair and sagging breasts, who need skilfull makeup to disguise their age. And since hair is one of the physical features that arouses most frequent comment, beautiful hair arrangements are contrasted with the unadorned and unkempt gray hair of old age, or even worse the use of false hair.³⁸

MOTHERS AS TEACHERS

Is it possible to identify ways in which mothers may have trained their own daughters that correspond to the traditions formulated by women rather than men? Can we isolate practices that might have been become established without male intervention, guidance, insistence, and correction?

There is nothing new in the view that mothers should take charge of the rearing of their children. Biblical stories of the devotion of mothers that was responsible for miracles gave such good women a high status, for instance, the Greek woman living near the borders of Tyre and Sidon who begged Christ to heal her daughter afflicted by an evil spirit. When He told her, “Let the children first be filled,” she replied “Yet the dogs under the table eat of the children’s crumbs,” and He hastened to effect the cure (Mark 7.25–30). They also draw attention to a major anxiety for mothers: that their children would die from illness. In some circumstances this great fear led to the use of amulets and worthless magical incantations.

Despite St. Paul’s recommendation of many good women who supported and led the first Christian communities, his considered opinion of the female sex in general was famously negative. Citing the fact that Eve was formed from Adam and then proceeded to transgress the command not to eat of the tree of good and evil, he ordered the woman “to learn in silence with all subjection ... not to usurp authority over the man but to be in silence” (I Tim. 2.11–12). He conceded that she might be saved in childbearing, and recommended that she should profess godliness with good works (I Tim. 2.15, 9–10). His words were often cited in Byzantium.³⁹ In respect of children,

however, most authors emphasized the basic duty of all women, from St. John Chrysostomos in the late fourth century to Archbishop Demetrios Chomatenos in the thirteenth: “The mother is responsible for the education of her children; she has the duty to care for them and to bring them up.”⁴⁰ At the end of his tract on the subject, Chrysostomos adds that mothers must also take care of their daughters, educating them and guiding them in good behavior in the women’s quarters, “far from the mad expenses and personal attentions and all those vanities which have the imprint of prostitutes.”⁴¹ From ancient authors, Jewish tradition, and the early Christian Fathers, the Byzantines inherited theories about the blessings of children and the importance of childhood.⁴² But it is necessary to investigate more closely how mothers fulfilled their duties, how their children reacted, what made for good relations between the generations, and how and if maternal success can be measured.

Apart from establishing a high standard of maternal care through their own lives, mothers influenced the formation of young children in unwritten ways. Their upbringing was usually part of an oral inheritance that was rarely written: the use of lullabies to rock babies to sleep, rhymes, songs, stories to entertain them, and proverbs to impart traditional guidance and warnings against bad behavior.⁴³ Sadly, most of this rich musical and poetic practice is lost, but there are traces of its significance for illiterate people. From the fact that Arius, the fourth-century theologian condemned as a heretic, composed hymns for working people to sing and that many tenth-century poems were written to be sung, we can suppose that singing was widespread in Byzantium as in most medieval societies. The depiction of musicians in manuscripts and carvings confirm the ubiquity of music, which was a natural part of family celebrations, weddings and births—for instance, playing, singing, and dancing must have been much more common than written sources suggest.⁴⁴

Despite the paucity of evidence, mothers took a major part in the education of their daughters as well as their sons. But since most medieval women were not educated in schools and many must have been illiterate, they are not normally considered “teachers.” Yet the role of teacher (διδάσκαλος) is one that male writers regularly attribute to their mothers. As Hatlie puts it: “Christian virtues of learning, discipline, nurturing, unwavering piety and indomitable spirit are among the characteristics epitomized by mothers.”⁴⁵ It is the modern notion of education that fails to recognize the constant, assumed, and therefore unnoticed role of mothers as teachers. In addition to the intellectual training provided by educated mothers, in most societies women teach by example, training their children, their apprentices, and their spiritual relations by demonstrating how to do

things. All the basic tasks of household maintenance, and in rural areas, farming activities, represent such tacit knowledge that was transmitted in this way. In manuscript illustrations women are shown participating in agricultural tasks such as looking after poultry; milking cows, sheep, goats; pruning vines; harvesting olives; or cutting and stacking crops. Some must have had more specialized skills as spinners and weavers of specially dyed cloth.

By watching and hearing someone who has already mastered them, members of the younger generation learn by imitation. And the “masters” of such skills can usually articulate why they perform their tasks in particular ways. Those with medical expertise, “wise women” skilled in childbirth and the care of young children, can hand on their knowledge to younger women without reference to any written texts. Treatments of illnesses or medical aspects of diet, written by Paul of Aegina in the seventh century and Symeon Seth in the eleventh, may also have circulated among women, but there is no reference to training young women with such texts as a guide. Usually, I suspect that women were sharing inherited knowledge, which they knew to be effective. Or they resorted to magical cures, consulting sorcerers who recommended the wearing of amulets among a number of practices denounced by the church at the Council in Trullo and in subsequent centuries.⁴⁶

This demonization of women condemned for evil practices occasionally resulted in witch trials, when women whose apparent power to cure or kill, to entrap and control, was assessed by ecclesiastical courts. While there is little evidence for the prosecution of witchcraft in a systematic way, women with a reputation for magical powers might be accused of sorcery inspired by the Devil, even when they appeared to achieve good results. In cases of possession young girls as well as older women who prophesied were “cured” by ecclesiastical exorcism. Yet the constant desire to know what the future held in store meant that fortune-tellers always found an audience. As Catia Galatariotou has shown there was a very fine line between proven medical experience and invocation of wicked forces.⁴⁷ And in hagiographical sources the existence of wicked women, often prostitutes, forms a background to their conversion to better ways of living.⁴⁸ For Byzantine authors, the mother who abandoned her children to join a religious community was praised and the prostitute who forced her daughter to follow the same profession condemned in value judgments current in medieval Byzantium. The characterization of good and bad mothers, loving and abusive, related to the basic contrast between Eve and the Virgin, Mother of God, which dominated men’s general view of women, and provided a template for assessing them.

In the case of mothers who simply brought up their children in what they considered the best possible way, the family of Holy Luke provides an arresting example. He was the third of seven children born in Greece in the tenth century to a devout couple. The *Life* reports that his mother Euphrosyne did not believe his enthusiasm for prayers and divine matters and one night she and some other women decided to follow him when he went out to make his devotions. As she hid herself she was astonished to see her son surrounded by a brilliant light, and was utterly terrified when he elevated himself above the ground, “as if drawn toward God.”⁴⁹ In this way she was convinced of his precocious spirituality and gave up trying to watch him or prevent him from following his calling.

Nonetheless she mourned her loss when he left the family house to embrace the monastic life. “Groaning deeply, she addressed herself to God to learn why she had to suffer so much: ‘I never kept him from Your service and duty. I never forced him to give You less attention. I never taught [ἐδίδουσκον] him to respect material things, in contrast with immaterial ones, or the things that pass from those which endure. For I had been well instructed by my parents to be the mother not only of the body but also of the soul, and I hoped that my son would display more respect for the soul.’ ”⁵⁰ This is a fine account of how Euphrosyne herself had been raised to fulfil the maternal role. She praises her own parents who had instructed her so that she would be a good Christian mother. The values she had been taught were spiritual, not to cherish things of the world that must pass, but to aim for a higher understanding of the things that endure—a neat summary of female education and all achieved by oral training, without written texts.

Her serious concerns were then demonstrated to the abbot of the monastery where Luke had sought to become a monk; he was frequently troubled by visions of Euphrosyne, who reprimanded him in these terms: “Why have you tyrannised my widowhood? Why have you removed my only consolation?” and so on and so on.⁵¹ The abbot naturally became cross with Luke, who had not told him anything about his family, and sent him back to his mother, commenting that her prayers were extremely effective. The *Life* tells us of Euphrosyne’s great joy when her son returned home, even if this was only for a short time. And when he then went back to the monastery it was with his mother’s blessing, because she had learned that it was suitable to honor God even above one’s parents.⁵² In this way Luke was the beneficiary of a Christian style of education that had been acquired by his mother in her childhood and then passed on to her own family. And not only to Luke, as we learn from a later passage in his *Life*. Some time later, when Luke was living alone on a barren island called

Ampelon, his sister Kale, who became a nun, brought him supplies of bread that he distributed to shipwrecked people. In this way we can see that Euphrosyne's daughter had been brought up in the same way and also devoted herself to a Christian way of life (as did another son).⁵³ Euphrosyne's own upbringing had trained her to value Christian principles, which help to prepare individuals for the life everlasting, and she had passed them on from generation to generation through the women, leaving little trace in the written sources.

Of course, it is the duty of biographers to show that their subjects were exceptionally holy even as children, a common theme in many hagiographies.⁵⁴ But interestingly, not all their mothers are as Christian as Euphrosyne. In the case of Theodore of Sykeon, born nine months after the visit of an imperial officer to the inn run by his mother Maria, he was surrounded by female relations: his mother, grandmother, and aunt.⁵⁵ These three knew how to look after themselves, managing the inn and surviving without husbands. Indeed, Maria had been trained by her own mother, Elpidia, learning through the same maternal preparation to cope with the relatively isolated life of an innkeeper. When Theodore was six years old Maria decided to take him to Constantinople to follow his father in the imperial service. She dressed him in his best clothes, put a golden belt around his waist, a golden collar round his neck, and bracelets on his arms and prepared to set off. Theodore naturally refused and fled away into a cave in a deserted place, where he hid with no food. When his mother tried to force him to accompany her, she received a vision from St. George, who informed her that "The emperor of heaven has need of him."⁵⁶ Maria was not happy at this turn of events and continued trying to convince her son to give up his acts of deprivation. But Theodore took off all the gold and extended his spiritual training.

Gradually, as his female relations admitted that nothing would stop him from realizing his calling, they stopped trying to restrain him. His mother left the inn and married an official of the metropolis of Ankyra. (The hagiographer comments that she lacked all natural sentiments for her son.) But his grandmother, his aunt, and his little half-sister, Blatta, possibly the result of another one-night stand in the inn, dedicated themselves to temperance and chastity and remained near him.⁵⁷ At the age of twelve Blatta was taken to Ankyra to join a nunnery, where she did many good works before she died. Elpidia also took monastic vows and devoted herself to the education of young local girls, even those tormented by evil spirits. Once cured, if they wanted to remain with her in the monastery, "she instructed them in their duties and they were able to join the ascetic flock."⁵⁸

Even though Maria was quite unsuccessful in her plans, she tried to educate Theodore in a way she considered suitable, preparing him for a role equal to that of his father. She knew that he should wear the right clothes and advertise his position and status by the display of jewelery, if he was going to make the right impression in the imperial capital. Unfortunately for her, Theodore was an obstinate young boy with other ideas, who refused to be distracted from his dedication to God, which he proceeded to demonstrate in numerous physical hardships, inspired by St. George. But his example influenced his sister, aunt, and grandmother in a positive way.

These Byzantine mothers, whom I have selected from a vast number recorded in the hagiographical literature, tried to take care of their children and to bring them up correctly. Incidental cases of mothers seeking cures for their children when possessed or extremely ill, confirm this common preoccupation.⁵⁹ Even widows and poor women made efforts to promote their sons and marry their daughters advantageously. This is a constant concern of mothers throughout the world in most historical periods. But it may also be possible to identify Byzantine structures, which facilitated this process: although Byzantine society was deeply hierarchical, it was also more flexible than in the medieval West. The greater social mobility allowed mothers to hope for a richer and less humble future for their children. Maternity in Byzantium might therefore contribute to the creation of new potential ways of advancing through society toward the upper echelons.

FEMALE OCCUPATIONS

Whatever else they did, all women were expected to spin and weave. “Spindle and distaff” is a rather quaint shorthand for spinning thread and then setting up looms to weave it into cloth. As Elizabeth Wayland Barber has shown, the production of cloth is essentially a female task and can be documented through most of archaeological time.⁶⁰ From surviving pieces of cloth preserved in the dry climate of Egypt, the style of shapeless long sleeved tunics often decorated with appliquéd embroidered bands and circular patches reflect the basic article of clothing, which could be held in by a belt. Only the type of decoration might reflect the gradual change from ancient gods to Christian God, and even then, the black-on-white embroidered patch might hold an image to ward off the evil eye.⁶¹ In Egypt some monks also set up looms and wove cloth for their monastic garments, but the activity remained largely one for women, including nuns. When Michael Psellos wished to draw attention to Empress Zoe’s unusual

interests, he pointed out how little time she devoted to these tasks.⁶²

Evidence of the importance of weaving in sustaining entire households comes from numerous hagiographic texts: in sixth-century Amida, Maria stayed at home weaving cloth while her mother Euphemia went out to perform charitable works. Their ascetic Christian routine involved “fasting, regulated prayer and recitation of the offices,” and Euphemia had taught her daughter to read and write so that they could study the psalms and scriptures together. Similarly, St. Thomaïs in the tenth century wove colored cloth that she made into tunics and gave away to the poor and naked.⁶³ These are instances of female domestic labor financing the practice of Christian philanthropy.⁶⁴ In both the cases just cited, the daughters were encouraged by their mothers to work, together or separately, for a higher Christian aim—the distribution of charity to the poor. Euphemia and Kale, the mother of Thomaïs, both raised their daughters in Christian traditions, which was indeed a normal duty expected of mothers.⁶⁵

WORKING WOMEN

Most women, however, were obliged to work outside their homes to support the family, selling flowers and preparing and selling food on the street, at markets, and at stopping places on the major routes. There were special corners of the Hippodrome where food was sold to the crowds enjoying the spectacles. When the Holy Fool disrupted the stalls of lupin seed sellers in the market of Constantinople, many of the vendors were women. The baths may have declined in Late Antiquity, but there is evidence for women continuing to use the baths, which were maintained by female bath attendants. Such activities, abundantly illustrated in the *Greek Anthology*, are confirmed by later Byzantine sources. Numerous epigrams celebrate particularly skilled entertainers who were commemorated in pictures and paintings (XVI, 277–90): expert dancers and musicians (V, 129, *orchestrída* from Asia; 271, dancing with golden castanets; 272, the harp player *kitharistrída*). They provide a rich source for male ideas of the most desirable qualities in a woman, even if she works in a public bath (V, 82). These range from young virgins, highly prized, to cheap prostitutes. Some men prefer the humble bed of a servant to high-born ladies who smell of scent and give themselves airs (V, 18).

Many of these epigrams date from the sixth century and were composed by authors like Agathias, a lawyer and historian who continued the *History* of Prokopios, and Paul the *silentarios*, who recorded a long description of the rededication of Hagia Sophia. There

is little evidence of Christian influence in them, and both of them wrote some of the most salacious, for example, V, 302, which deplores the problems of sex with a variety of persons, from prostitutes, to one's wife or servants, with someone else's wife or *their* servants, with widows, or "unnatural sin," ranked with adultery, drawing attention to the disadvantages in every case.⁶⁶ While of course they follow a recognized style and can be read as literary exercises, it's quite surprising that they were composed at the time of Justinian's efforts to enforce Orthodoxy in Byzantium. They should, therefore, be seen as part of the ancient inheritance that continued to flourish in Constantinople among other urban traditions, which the Byzantines were unwilling to give up.⁶⁷ And in the late ninth century, when Constantine, a cleric, put the surviving edition together, he had no qualms about including them. In this way, a collection of erotic verse was recopied and preserved, even if the Christian poems took pride of place in the first volume.⁶⁸ These indirect references may be more revealing of the lives of women than carefully constructed rhetorical speeches. While they stress the ubiquity of prostitutes (male and female), and compare experience with both, there is a measure of appreciation in some descriptions of women, which indicate that character and spirit might overcome poverty and misery to create a more manageable life. For some professional courtesans there are some unexpected tributes and words of advice: "Don't listen to your mother, Philumena ... make your own living, try to behave with propriety ... if you get with child, bring it to birth I entreat you. Don't be troubled about that; when it grows up it will find out who its father was" (V, 40). Again, the reference to a mother's opinion suggests a shared background in prostitution, which seems highly likely in view of the dangers of this profession. Mothers who had already mastered the problem of unwanted pregnancies, the methods of usually ineffective contraception and abortion, could help their daughters in similarly difficult circumstances. They could also impart some of the skills of seduction, use of makeup, clothing, and hairstyles, which were such a necessary element of the trade of such women.⁶⁹ In another striking image, the new mother wonders whether she can ever give up her baby, a charming little boy. She considers whether his life would be better as a servant in a rich household and then decides that she can't bear to part with him (V, 178). In this way, mothers coped with the pressures of another mouth to feed and another dependent child to care for. But the fate of destitute women or profligate prostitutes is harshly described (V, 27, 271, 273) and must have been common.

Similarly, the technical knowledge of entertainers who played musical instruments, danced, sang, and acted on stage seems to have

been restricted to particular families, as a well-known text describes. At the beginning of the sixth century a desperate widow, mother of three little girls, tried to find a man to take on the role of her deceased husband. In searching for a husband she was unsuccessful and therefore adopted a different strategy. She decided to display her daughters in the Hippodrome of Constantinople in attitudes of supplication and thus found a way to support her family. I cite the familiar story:

When the children came of age, the mother immediately put them on the stage there because they were fair to look upon.... Now Comito, the first one, had already scored a brilliant success among the harlots of her age; and Theodora, the next in order, clothed in a little sleeved frock suitable to a slave girl, would follow her about, performing various services.⁷⁰

There follows a detailed description of the talents of the second daughter, who was going to become empress as the wife of Justinian. Prokopios preserves a highly unflattering portrait of Theodora in his *Anekdotia* (literally “unpublished,” and hence “*Secret*” *History*), a passage of invective typical of ancient authors.⁷¹ But the solution to her difficult situation adopted by the mother of Comito, Theodora, and Anastasia rested on her own competence and talents: she directed the instruction and formation of her daughters in order to ensure that they could perform with great success in the theater at Constantinople. Dancers, mimes, and players of flute, cithara, and organ took their place in the spectacles of the circus (as is shown on the base of the column of Theodosios that still stands in the Hippodrome). They provided entertainment between the races of horses and chariots organized by the Blues and the Greens, the circus troupes who had responsibility for public entertainment.⁷² And for the feminine spectacles, we know that these were passed from generation to generation, from mother to daughter, as in the case of Theodora and her friend Antonina, who had certainly learned a lot from their mothers. Prokopios is equally rude about Antonina’s background: her father and grandfather were charioteers in Byzantium and Thessalonike, while her mother was attached to the theater. Again the mother is held responsible for training her daughter. Both of them were surrounded by cheap sorcerers, and Antonina used magic arts to deceive her husband, Belisarios, because she was devoted to adultery.⁷³

While devout Christian women tried to take their family duties seriously, those less interested in the well-being of their souls and the promised life everlasting might neglect their children or even force them into prostitution and other employment deplored by the church. Poverty might have obliged them to sell themselves and the bodies of their daughters. Occasionally, this was recognized by measures

designed to save women from such exploitation (see the efforts of Theodosios I, Empress Theodora, and Michael IV).⁷⁴ But from ancient times, courtesans had passed on their professional skills, often from mother to daughter, as in the case of the famous Salome, or as imagined in the *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, where Lucian reflects on older women training the younger generation in useful techniques.⁷⁵ Medieval Western sources, such as the *Ornament of Women*, also stress the training of daughters by their mothers with experience of sexual prowess: instructions about the use of makeup, ointments, false hair, and low-cut costumes may derive from Ovid. While this fulfills the literary function of the aging courtesan, it clearly depends on a shared experience of mothers and daughters.⁷⁶

Nor is this element of training limited to notorious cases such as that of Salome, as it can also be observed in some narrative and hagiographical sources, which preserve positive accounts of the upbringing of girls and female saints. To take a few examples, the widow Sophia in Edessa had protected and educated her daughter in a most Christian way until the moment came for her to be married. The mother then made a terrible mistake in permitting a visiting Goth, who was billeted upon them and appeared to be a good strong soldier, to negotiate an alliance. As a result Sophia was condemned to the existence of a slave in his already existing family, until she miraculously managed to escape.⁷⁷ Similarly, Kale, the mother of St. Thomaïs, raised her daughter in a most Christian environment but misjudged the character of her son-in-law, Stephanos. For thirteen years, he beat his wife, who eventually died of his blows. By this time Kale had become a nun and was abbess of a community, which moved the tomb of Thomaïs into their church, where her relics performed miracles.⁷⁸

Nearly everything that we know about the various professions exercised by women—those of midwife, wet nurse, or mourner, for example—is difficult to define because of the lack of written information. But much indirect evidence reveals women with a special competence, who participate in events of enormous importance, such as birth and death. The midwives assisting young women in the process of bringing a baby safely into the world, and those who mourn the dead with the traditional funerary chants (*myrologoi*), following the body of the deceased with tears, beating their breasts, tearing out their hair, and uttering loud cries in an appropriate manner must have had some professional knowledge.⁷⁹ They would impart it to their own daughters or to other women who needed to master the same skills. In Byzantium aristocratic families paid for the services of these women and even less wealthy families would engage a wet nurse if the young mother was unable or unwilling to feed the new baby.⁸⁰ And we know

that children who were fed in this way remembered their nurses and their milk brothers and sisters.

Even though they don't command much attention from male authors, these feminine jobs always took a major place in Byzantine life. Their successful performance supposes traditions and practices by which older women with some expertise instructed younger ones. For midwives, those with experience probably took on apprentices and transmitted the skills gained from assisting at many births to these younger students. While there is no Byzantine "Trotula," and the figure of Metrodora, a second- or third-century doctor, is poorly defined, there must have been tried and tested practices, which permitted skilled midwives to train the next generation.⁸¹ Possibly this was one of many professions that passed from mother to daughter, like the skill of the mourner, the flower arranger, the brewer of beer, the second-hand clothes merchant, or the bath attendant.

DEDICATED CHRISTIAN LIVES

There can be no doubt that good mothers served as models for their daughters, in the same way that female saints created patterns of Christian behavior, which were recommended to all women. This was recognized by Theodoretos of Kyrrhos when he compiled his *Historia religiosa* and specifically wrote about an almost equal number of holy men and women, so that members of both sexes would have models to follow.⁸² He also stressed that women could attain the highest ascetic standards, writing of Marana and Lyra: "despite having a weaker nature, they display the same zeal as the men and freed their sex from its ancestral disgrace."⁸³ He goes on, however, to show how their adoption of living in the open air, wearing heavy chains and fasting, strengthened them for their travels to Jerusalem and to Isauria to visit St. Thekla. He concludes: "Their way of life has adorned the female sex becoming as models for other women.... They will be crowned by the Master with the wreaths of victory." In similar vein, Domnina is praised for emulating the great hermit and healer of Kyrrhos, Maron; her virtue was said to inspire other women (communities of up to 250), who imitated her dedication to God. She also persuaded her mother and brothers to spend their fortune on a church.⁸⁴

In his account of his own family St. Gregory of Nyssa described the Christian dedication of his sister Macrina.⁸⁵ She was the eldest of nine children born to family of senatorial standing in Cappadocia. Emmelia, her mother, knew before the birth that the child was going to be a new Thekla, although she was named Macrina, after her grandmother. Once she attained marriageable age (probably at

twelve), her parents betrothed her to a suitable fiancé, who died shortly after. Macrina then refused to marry anyone else, claiming that her first husband would remain the only one (a common theme among Roman widows who wished to avoid remarriage, except that she was probably only a teenager with no experience of marriage proper). Her parents accepted this, and she devoted herself to a Christian life of good works, sharing her considerable wealth, dispensing with servants, and living very humbly.

In a clear instance of role-reversal, Macrina took the lead in persuading her mother to adopt ascetic practices and perform the most menial tasks.⁸⁶ When famine threatened the lives of local people, they welcomed them into their house monastery and fed and cared for them. In her study of Cappadocian asceticism Susanna Elm also argues that Macrina's example influenced her brothers, Basil and Naukratios, when they set up their own monastic retreats.⁸⁷ Although this is not a case of the mother training the daughter as much as Macrina inspiring her mother, it proved a lasting instance of female devotion and cooperation in a famous house monastery, which may have prompted St. Basil's New City of philanthropic institutions outside Caesarea.

Mothers who encouraged their daughters to embrace the celibate life often formed the kernel of a new monastery. The stories of the Desert Fathers contain a few references to some presumably well-to-do mothers who supported their virgin daughters rather than forcing them to marry. In Antioch, Palladius recorded an account of two virgins, each qualified as a manly woman, *gynaikon andreion*, who lived in seclusion with their mothers.⁸⁸ Papyri preserve similar stories. Later sources from Egypt also note a couple of female monastic leaders, abbesses characterized as Desert Mothers, who guided both monks and nuns.⁸⁹ Some mothers influenced their sons in a similar fashion. In the case of St. Symeon the Younger, his mother, Martha, attained sainthood herself, and shared in his monastic life. At the dedication of his new church she even led the procession that carried the cross around the building to bless each part of it.⁹⁰ Other mothers are presented by male authors as representative of an anti-family ideology, for instance, St. Matrona, who neglected her children, abandoned her daughter, and went off to practice asceticism; similarly, after the death of her two younger children, St. Theodora of Thessalonike persuaded her husband that they should leave their six-year-old daughter in a monastery in the city so that they could dedicate themselves to the ascetic life.⁹⁰

While most mothers and fathers were preoccupied with arranging the most advantageous marriages for their children, this strategy could be thwarted by a youthful dedication to Christ and the monastic life, as Macrina, Luke, and Theodore show.⁹² In addition, parents could also decide to consecrate a child as yet unborn to the service of the Lord; this is the case of several elderly couples who had given up hope of producing a child, for example, the mothers of Theodoretos of Kyrrhos, Gregory of Nazianzos, or Elizabeth of Herakleia. The mother of St. Stephen the Younger presents an even clearer instance, since she already had daughters. But every Friday she went to the church of the Virgin at Blachernai, where she prayed before the famous icon imploring the Virgin to grant her her wish for a son.⁹³ After the miraculous birth, the child was presented to the Theotokos and dedicated to the celibate life.

In addition to the refusal of marriage, children could also avoid the consequences of arranged marriage alliances if they refused to consummate their union, in effect dedicating themselves to a Christian celibate life despite their married status.⁹⁴ This was one of the few ways in which children could rebel against their parents' natural desire for grandchildren. In the case of Theophanes, later known as the Confessor, and his wife Megalo, there was great consternation at their decision to live apart in separate monasteries rather than produce the much-desired offspring.⁹⁵ Most examples of this determination to life in a celibate marriage are drawn from hagiographic sources, which naturally present it as pleasing to God and eventually as accepted by the frustrated and disappointed parents.⁹⁶

THE MODEL OF ST. ANNE AND THE THEOTOKOS

Is it possible that in this respect the supreme model, that of the Virgin Mother of God, might have influenced Byzantine mothers?⁹⁷ Certainly, the *Protevangelion* of James contains the whole history of the miraculous conception of her elderly parents, Joachim and Anna, the birth of the child, her dedication as a young girl, and preparation for her unique role. Apocryphal texts also give the Virgin a role in the education of the young Christ Child.⁹⁸ In the absence of information provided by the New Testament, Christians asked themselves how the Virgin had been selected and then educated, and how she brought up her own Son. Mythic traditions developed to fill the gap.

Later reports elaborate on St. Anne's part in the education of the Virgin, which they extend into something far more developed than the mere capacity to read; she was trained in Hebrew, which she mastered

at a young age. Two theories are given to account for this. While her parents Joachim and Anne, presented their daughter at the Temple, where she also learned to weave, another account attributes her learning to an angel who taught her: “she received an education in perfection from the angel who nourished her.”⁹⁹ However, only one representation of the Virgin being instructed in the Temple is known; it occurs in the fourteenth-century mosaic at the Kariye Camii with an unfamiliar inscription, which suggests that it is a very late addition to the tradition.¹⁰⁰ And against the notion that her parents were responsible for her education, in the ninth century the monk Epiphanius emphasized the fact that the Virgin continued her education, including the study of Hebrew, on her own. He records that her father died when she was only seven years old, and her mother Anne went to live in Jerusalem close to her for two years, and then she also died. Later Paschalis of Rome translated the text into Latin and in this form it became widely known and copied in the West.¹⁰¹ In contrast to the Byzantine accounts, the Western tradition that St. Anne took charge of her daughter’s instruction is recorded in detail.¹⁰² It gave rise to images of the mother teaching the Virgin to read, pointing with her finger to the text of the Psalms: “Audi filia et vide et inclina aurem tuam ... ” (Listen, daughter, and see and incline your ear), words that predict the Annunciation. While this image became widely diffused through the *Bibles Moralisées*, it seems to be completely missing from the Byzantine tradition, where Anne does not play this role. Yet for some at least the Virgin was educated and could read. In a manuscript of the twelfth century she is shown sitting with a book in her lap.¹⁰³ While Byzantine histories of the infancy of the Virgin do not spell out the role of her mother, Anne was recognized as a saint and is represented on icons with her daughter and her grandson, Christ.¹⁰⁴ These images and their cult must have inspired some mothers who seem to have identified with the saintly mothers of the Bible, a tradition that also contributes to the attachment felt by women to icons in general, not only painted representations of female saints. In this respect, mothers who teach their children how to venerate icons can be seen to perform an important aspect of maternal education. Here, the cases of Theoktiste and Euphrosyne, respectively mother and mother-in-law of Empress Theodora, are striking: during the period of official iconoclast persecution instigated by Theophilos, his wife Theodora took their children to the “monastery of the empresses,” where the two older ladies preserved their icons and venerated them with kisses and other marks of affection and respect.¹⁰⁵

It’s reasonable to inquire whether Theodora had not been raised in this iconophile tradition by her mother, Theoktiste, and Euphrosyne

by *her* mother, who was none other than Maria of Amnia, the first unfortunate wife of Constantine VI, granddaughter of Philaretos. When the emperor divorced Maria, she was sent with her two daughters into a monastic exile, where they remained until Michael II demanded that the youngest, Euphrosyne, become his wife entirely for dynastic reasons. On her return to the imperial court her husband had to accept that she retained her devotion to icons. After arranging her stepson's marriage, she also met Theoktiste, another fervent iconophile. And together they set about subverting the persecution of icon venerated by teaching the imperial children to demonstrate their love for the holy icons. In this way one can identify a maternal role that is reproduced through the generations, transmitted by a silent practice and tradition that nonetheless leaves very clear traces: the children of Theodora and Theophilos did not follow their father's iconoclasm. Other less famous mothers could well have raised their children in the same way.

Like other experiences passed from mother to daughter, in Byzantium this style of worship was not written down at the time. But we can see in the testimony of Luke's mother, another Euphrosyne, that she provided guidance and reinforced a not inconsiderable feminine wisdom. This type of experience, which helped women in their maternal tasks of bringing up children to be good Christians, can be compared with the skills of the midwife. Byzantine society, however, accepted contradictory Christian aims that did not assist mothers: on the one hand, it was normal to hope that children would marry and produce their own families, and on the other, they might dedicate themselves to the church (or their parents might insist that they entered monasteries). The fact that this second alternative existed throughout the Byzantine centuries made it possible for young people to refuse marriage and consecrate their lives to a monastic existence, which their parents were bound to respect.

The ideal of the monastery continued to attract young people of both sexes even from a very young age. In some cases, mothers entered communities together with their daughters, or sent their daughters to a monastic retreat to be rid of their children. So maternal influence in such a choice can't be ignored. In others, they expressed their Christian devotion by donating or selling their land to a monastery; see for instance, the acts of Costantina and her daughter Christodoule in 1067, or Maria and her daughter Anna in 1172, both drawn from the Messina documents of the archive of Medinacdi (Toledo).¹⁰⁶ Numerous instances specify the gift of property, movable goods, or cash in return for the intercessory prayers of the monks, and/or burial in the monastic church. Women share with their male relatives in commissioning frescoes and restoring churches, for

instance, at Asinou in Cyprus, and in 1212 a mother and her two daughters are shown as patrons of a church in rural Cappadocia, then under Seljuk control, and had themselves portrayed on the walls as the female donors.¹⁰⁷ Among the elite of Byzantine society such “matronage” had always been prevalent, and in the fourteenth century, Theodora Synadene, niece of Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos, founded the nunnery dedicated to the Virgin of Sure Hope with her daughter, Euphroysyne. It provided a home for the widowed mother and her celibate daughter, who are depicted both as nuns and in their former secular court costume in the magnificent Lincoln College Typikon, which records the Rule.¹⁰⁸ Their style of architectural and artistic patronage remained a common practice throughout Byzantine territories right up to the Ottoman conquest.



In conclusion, maternity obviously demanded a certain competence, which was passed through the generations by oral traditions; mothers, grandmothers, and other female relatives might have a profound influence. Within feminine monasteries, abbesses exercised a spiritual maternity over their younger nuns. But for the great majority who had no choice in the matter, maternal roles were constructed and reconstructed at every period, reinforcing the links between mothers and daughters and according women in Byzantium an unrivalled influence.

NOTES

1. On this image of idealized womanhood, see Alan Cameron, *Claudian: Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius* (Oxford, 1970), 99–102, 194 (on the genre), 409 (on the emphatic praise of the mother, unusual in such a poem).

2. R. Macrides, “The Byzantine Godfather,” *BMGS* 12 (1987), 139–62; eadem, “Substitute Parents and Their Children,” in *Adoption et fosterage*, ed. M. Corbier (Paris, 1999), 307–19. A. Leroy-Molinghen, “Styliané,” *B* 39 (1969), 155–63; D. R. Reinsch, “Der Name der Adoptivtochter des Michael Psellos,” *Medioevo Greco* 8 (2008), 271–74.

3. As Anthony Kaldellis notes, “The Study of Women and Children: Methodological Challenges and New Directions,” in Paul Stephenson, ed., *The Byzantine World* (London/New York, 2011), 61–71.

4. See among many studies Clarissa W. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1991); *Medieval Mothering*, ed. John C. Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (New York/London, 1996).

5. Kathleen Biddick, “Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible,” in *Studying Medieval Women: Sex, Gender, Feminism*, ed. Nancy F. Partner (Cambridge, MA, 1993), reprinted in Biddick, *The Shock of Medievalism* (Durham, NC, 1998), 135–64.

6. Biddick, 155; cf. Kate Cooper, “The Household and the Desert: Monastic and Biological Communities in the *Lives of Melania the Younger*,” in Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, eds., *Household, Women, and Christianities in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2005), 11–35; Ville Vuolanto, “Choosing Asceticism: Children and Parents, Vows and Conflicts,” in *Children in Late Ancient Christianity*, ed. Cornelia B. Horn and Robert R. Phenix (Tübingen, 2009), 255–91. I thank Chrysi Kotsifou for bringing this important publication to my attention.

7. Ross Kraemer, *Unreliable Witnesses: Religion, Gender and History in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean* (Oxford, 2011); Carole Monica C. Burnett, “Mother-Child Bonding in the Greek and Latin Fathers of the Church,” in *Children in Late Ancient Christianity* (as earlier), 75–101. In some cases the evidence is just suppressed; see Jennifer L. Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert: Monks, Laity and Spiritual Authority in Sixth-Century Gaza* (Baltimore/London, 2005), 80, on the absence of letters from women addressed to John and Barsanuphius; cf. the survival of some by women and slaves in the letter collection of Paphnutius, 155–56, n. 52.

8. Cooper, “The Household and the Desert,” as earlier, 17.

9. Brent Shaw, “The Passion of Perpetua,” *Past and Present* 139 (1993); Joyce Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman* (New York, 1997); Brown, *The Body and Society*, as earlier, 154.

10. Brown, *ibid.*

11. Volanto, as earlier, 284, summarizes the significance of maternal socialization of children. R. Mathisen, *People, Personal Expression, and Social Relations in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor, 2003), vol. I, ch. 3 on families, in particular, 71: Sidonius Apollinaris's references to his daughters and granddaughter, Roscia, who was “nurtured in the most indulgent lap of her grandmother and aunts, which rarely happens when grandchildren are raised.” On the gendered aspect of such transmission of tradition, see Walter Pohl, “Gender and Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages,” in *Gender in the Early Medieval World, East and West, 300–900*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge, UK, 2004), 23–43, esp. 36–40. Striking examples are provided by Elisheva Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe* (Princeton, 2007).

12. Arietta Papaconstantinou, “Introduction: *Homo Byzantinus* in the Making,” in *Becoming Byzantine: Children and Childhood in Byzantium*, ed. A. Papaconstantinou and A.-M. Talbot (Washington, DC, 2009), 1–14, with broad bibliography; and Alice-Mary Talbot, “The Death and Commemoration of Byzantine Children,” *ibid.*, 283–308, esp. 283–87. See also her article on “Women” in *The Byzantines*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo (Chicago, 1997), 117–43, with the tripartite division into girlhood, motherhood, and widowhood.

13. G. Prinzing, “Observations on the Legal Status of Children and the Stages of Childhood in Byzantium,” in Papaconstantinou and Talbot, as earlier, 15–34, esp. 20–21.

14. Marie-France Auzépy, “Prolégomènes à une histoire du poil,” *TM* 14 (2002) = *Mélanges G. Dagron*, 1–12, at n. 88.

15. These issues are explored in “Public and Private Forms of Religious Commitment among Byzantine Women,” [chapter 6](#) in this volume.

16. Alice-Mary Talbot, “Old Age in Byzantium,” *BZ* 77 (1984), 267–78.

17. Cf. Judith Herrin, “In Search of Byzantine Women: Three Avenues of Approach,” [chapter 2](#) in this volume, on the story told by John Moschos about a poor widow, Maria, or the destitute mother obliged to sell her daughter into prostitution; see Jane Rowlandson, ed., *Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt: A Source Book* (Cambridge, UK/New York, 1998), no. 208, 271–72, or no. 212, 274.

18. *The Greek Anthology*, vol. I, bk. V, 276; ed. and trans. W. R. Paton, 5 vols. (London, 1916–18; repr. 1979–80).

19. See the interesting observations of Vuolanto, as earlier; and “Public and Private Forms of Religious Commitment among Byzantine Women,” [chapter 6](#) in this volume.

20. Chrysi Kotsifou, “Papyrological Perspectives on Orphans in the World of Late Ancient Christianity,” in *Children in Late Ancient Christianity*, as earlier, 339–73; Timothy S. Miller, *The Orphans of Byzantium: Child Welfare in the Christian Empire* (Washington, DC, 2003).

21. Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, III, 2.4. She was not the first bride proposed for the young emperor-designate, as Maria/Marta had already received the Norman princess Olympias, known in Byzantium as Helena, who was later rejected; *Alexiad*, I 10,12,15; IV, 5.

22. See other instances of his evidence for the authority of women in arranging marriages, in Herrin, “In Search of Byzantine Women: Three Avenues of Approach,” [chapter 2](#) in this volume.

23. Angeliki E. Laiou, *Mariage, amour et parenté à Byzance aux XIe–XIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1992), 16–17; see also Reinsch, “Der Name der Adoptivtochter ...” (note 2 earlier), for confirmation of this in the case of Michael Psellos, who wished to betroth his adopted daughter advantageously because his employment at the court of Constantine IX was precarious.

24. See Herrin, “In Search of Byzantine Women: Three Avenues of Approach,” [chapter 2](#) in this volume.

25. For boys, too, the court presented a chance of important employment, and some families chose to have a son castrated with the aim of gaining one of the posts reserved for eunuchs.

26. Niketas Choniates records the famous pun, which suggests that the two words were pronounced in identical fashion; *N. Ch.*, ed. Bekker, 580; ed. Van Dieten, vol. I, 441–2; Eng. trans., Magoulas, 242.

27. *N. Ch.*, ed. Bekker, 417; Van Dieten, 321–22; Magoulas, 177.

28. *Theopanes*, AM 6287, I 469; Eng. trans. Mango and Scott, 645.

29. There is an enormous bibliography on this topic; see most recently, Martha Vinson, “Romance and Reality in the Byzantine Bride Shows,” in Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith, eds., *Gender in the Early Medieval World, East and West, 300–900* (Cambridge, UK, 2004), 102–20, stressing the political dimensions and the often disastrous consequences of this method of selection. She also draws attention to the powerful mother-in-law of the selected bride, who often played a critical part in the process.

30. L. Rydén, *The Life of St. Philaretos the Merciful Written by His Grandson Niketas ...* (Uppsala, 2002); Herrin, *Women in Purple*, 132–38. I find it impossible to accept Peter Schreiner’s view that beauty alone determined the choice of imperial bride; see “Réflexions sur la famille impériale à Byzance (VIIe–Xe siècles),” *B* 61 (1991), 181–93, esp. 189.

31. Rydén, as earlier, 82–93; M.-F. Auzépy, “De Philarète, de sa famille et de certains monastères de Constantinople,” in *Les saints et leur sanctuaire à Byzance: texts, images et monuments*, ed. C. Jolivet-Lévi, M. Kaplan, J.-P. Sodini, Byzantina Sorbonensia 11 (Paris, 1994), 113–32; reprinted in M.-F. Auzépy, *L’histoire des Iconoclastes*, Bilans de Recherche 2 (Paris, 2007), 179–98.

32. C. W. Atkinson, “‘Your Servant, My Mother’: The Figure of Saint Monica in the Ideology of Christian Motherhood,” in C. W. Atkinson, C. H. Buchanan, and M. R. Miles, *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality* (Boston, 1985), 139–72, esp. 139; Elizabeth Clark, “Rewriting Early Christian History: Augustine’s Representation of Monica,” in *Portraits of Spiritual Authority*, ed.

J. W. Drijvers and J. W. Watt (Leiden, 1999), 3–23, showing how Monica's maternal role is occluded in the idea of "Mother Church."

33. George Kedrenos, *Historiarum Compendium*, ed. I. Bekker, 2 vols. (Bonn, 1838–39), II, 19–20.

34. This is borne out by most of the contributions to *Becoming Byzantine: Children and Childhood in Byzantium*, as earlier; on Niketas, see Ryden, as earlier, 108–9. On Styliane, see Anthony Kaldellis, *Mothers and Sons, Fathers and Daughters: The Byzantine Family of Michael Psellus* (Notre Dame, IN, 2006) 118–38.

35. Talbot, "Old Age in Byzantium," note 7 earlier.

36. Leonora Neville, "Taxing Sophronia's Son-in-Law: Representations of Women in Provincial Documents," in *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience 800–1200*, ed. Lynda Garland (Aldershot, UK, 2006), 77–89; Laiou, *Mariage, amour et parenté*, 89–94.

37. Brown, *The Body and Society*, as earlier, 147–52.

38. *Greek Anthology*, I, book V, 13, 260; 27 (unkempt); 76, 273 (false hair); cf. 218 and 220 (on men cutting their daughter's or lover's hair as a punishment), and 281 (where a young man complains that his elaborate curls were flattened when a woman poured a jug of water over them). The Council in Trullo (692) issued a canon specifically against fancy hairstyles that clearly applied to both men and women; see " 'Femina Byzantina': The Council in Trullo on Women," [chapter 5](#) in this volume.

39. See Herrin, " 'Femina Byzantina': The Council in Trullo on Women," [chapter 5](#) in this volume; Stavroula Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances: Reading the Body in Byzantine Passions and Lives of Holy Women*, *Studia Byzantina Upsaliensis* 9 (Uppsala, 2005), 170–71, 175, 177–78.

40. Chomatenos, as cited by A. Laiou, *Mariage, amour et parenté à Byzance aux XIe–XIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1992), 148; Chrysostom, *Sur la vaine gloire et l'éducation des enfants*, paras. 22, 32, 40 (where the mothers of boys are associated with their father in the duties of parents), ed. A.-M. Malingrey, *Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes* (Paris, 1972), 106, 124, 136. Elsewhere Chrysostomos remarks that his mother considered raising a daughter a cause of anxiety, whereas a son required an expensive education, a fundamental difference; see Raffaella Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind* (New York, 2003), 75.

41. Chrysostomos, *Sur la vaine gloire*, paras. 90, 196–97. This is the only mention of young girls.

42. A. Rousselle, *Porneia: On Desire and the Body in Antiquity* (Oxford, 1988), 47–62; T. Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire* (London, 1989), 143–208; G. Clark, "The 'Ages' of Childhood," in *The Church and Childhood*, ed. D. Wood, *Studies in Church History* 31 (1994), 12–27; Papaconstantinou and Talbot, as earlier.

43. A fascinating glimpse into the importance of oral sources is presented by Sharon Farmer, "Persuasive Voices: Clerical Images of Medieval Wives," *Speculum* 61 (July 1986), 517–43; see also Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England* (London, 1995), 133–41.

44. For a flute player depicted on a hanging and surviving flutes, see Eunice Dauterman Maguire, Henry Maguire, and Maggie J. Duncan-Flowers, *Art and Holy Powers in the Early Christian House* (Urbana/Champagne/Chicago, 1989), 220, 224–25. Traveling flute players are noted in an intriguing story of a musical dog; see John Duffy, "Mondo Cane: Some Comments on Two Performing Dog Scenes from Byzantium," in *Realia Byzantina*, ed. Sofia Kotzabassi and Giannis Mavromatis (Berlin/New York, 2009), 35–41; he also emphasizes the significance of music, for example, sung by mothers when soothing babies. The music of the organ was used to calm Justin II during his madness; see John of Ephesos, *Ecclesiastical History, Third Part*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford, 1860), III, 2.

45. Peter Hatlie, "Images of Motherhood and Self in Byzantine Literature," *DOP* 63 (2009), 41–57; cf. A. Kaldellis, "The Study of Women and Children," as earlier, note 3, suggests the potential of such an approach; see also his study, *Mothers and Sons, Fathers and Daughters* (as earlier), 17–28, with a translation of Psellos's *Enkomion* for his mother, 51–109.
46. "Femina Byzantina": The Council in Trullo on Women," [chapter 5](#) in this volume; Dorothy Abrahamse, "Magic and Sorcery in the Hagiography of the Middle Byzantine Period," *BF* 8 (1982), 3–17, esp. 15 on a mother who shared her very strong powers with her daughter; Richard P. H. Greenfield, "A Contribution to the Study of Palaeologan Magic," in *Byzantine Magic*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, DC, 1995), 117–54; Jane Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium* (Cambridge, UK, 2007), 335–39. Studies of magic practices in Byzantium are full of references to superstitious old women and practitioners "not by coincidence a female" (for example, Marie-Theres Fögen, "Balsamon on Magic: From Roman Secular Law to Byzantine Canon Law," in Maguire, as earlier, 107); M. Dickie, "The Fathers of the Church and the Evil Eye," also in Maguire, 9–34.
47. Catia Galatariotou, "Holy Women and Witches: Aspects of Byzantine Conceptions of Gender," *BMGS* 9 (1984/5), 55–94.
48. Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances*, as earlier, 59–78, and see note 74 later.
49. *The Life of St. Luke of Steiris*, as earlier, 14–15.
50. *Ibid.*, 11, 18–21. The sentiment of respect for the soul is commonly expressed but not always by a woman in such specifically personal terms.
51. *Ibid.*, 12–13, 20–23.
52. *Ibid.*, 15, 24–25.
53. *Ibid.*, 52, 82–85.
54. Béatrice Chevallier Caseau, "Childhood in Byzantine Saints' Lives," in Papaconstantinou and Talbot, as earlier, 127–66.
55. *Vie de S. Théodore de Sykéon 3*, ed. A.-J. Festugière, *Subsidia Hagiographica* 48 (Brussels, 1970), 3; Eng. trans. E. Dawes and N. H. Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints* (Crestwood, NY, 1977), 88.
56. *Ibid.*, 5; trans. 89.
57. *Ibid.*, 9; trans. 93.
58. *Ibid.*, 25; trans. 105–6.
59. For instance, the mother "whose whole life was anchored on her daughter, seeing the girl so demented that she gathered and ate stinking dung and her own excrement," who was cured by the relics of St. Mary the Younger, *Life*, para. 13, in Talbot, as earlier, 270; or the many cases recorded in the *Miracles of Artemios*; see Herrin, "Public and Private Forms of Religious Commitment among Byzantine Women," [chapter 6](#) in this volume.
60. Elizabeth Wayland Barber, *Women's Work, the First 20,000 Years: Women, Cloth, and Society in Early Times* (New York/London, 1994).
61. Eunice Dauterman Maguire and Henry Maguire, *Other Icons: Art and Power in Byzantine Secular Culture* (Princeton, 2007), 66.
62. Psellus, *Chronographie*, ed. E. Renauld, 2 vols. (Paris, 1926–28), bk. 6.64; Eng. trans. E.R.A. Sewter, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers* (Harmondsworth, UK, 1966), 239. Psellos also describes spindle and loom as those things that appeal to women.
63. John of Ephesos, *History of the Eastern Saints*, cited by Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Sacred Bonding: Mothers and Daughters in Early Syriac Hagiography," *JECS* 4 (1996), 27–56. I am most grateful to the author for sharing this article with me prior to its publication and happily acknowledge its inspiration for the present study. Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances*, as earlier, 172; cf. Talbot, in *The Byzantines*, ed. Cavallo, 126, 130.

64. See also many other examples cited by Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 1994), 215, 263, 374–75, who points out that the unit of mother and daughter is probably at the root of the first female monasteries.

65. See earlier, and Béatrice Caseau, “Childhood in Byzantine Saints’ Lives,” in Papaconstantinou and Talbot, as earlier, esp. 150–51.

66. While this is modeled on earlier epigrams by Posidippus and Metrodorus, bk. ix, 359–60, which stress the miseries or joys of life, Agathias takes a bolder view of “the road to the Land of Love.”

67. Dorothea R. French, “Maintaining Boundaries: The Status of Actresses in Early Christian Society,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 52 (1998), 293–318; Anthony Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, UK, 2007), 176–79.

68. Alan Cameron, *The Greek Anthology from Meleager to Planudes* (Oxford, 1993); M. Lauxtermann, “Ninth-Century Classicism and the Erotic Muse,” *Desire and Denial in Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (Aldershot, UK, 1999), 161–70, on Leo the Philosopher’s “enlightened hellenism,” which was destroyed by Photios’s “moral fundamentalism.” Cf. Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium*, 123–24, 182–83.

69. See the well-known examples of Antonina and Theodora, cited by Prokopios and the study of repentant prostitutes in Constantinou, *Female Corporal Performances*, as earlier, 59–78.

70. Procopius, *Anekdotia*, ix, 8–9, ed. H. W. Dewing, 104–5.

71. Averil Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (London, 1985), 56–61.

72. Alan Cameron, *Circus Factions* (Oxford, 1976), 206–7, 219–21, 226–29; C. Roueché, *Performers and Partisans at Aphrodisias in the Roman and Late Roman Periods* (London, 1993), 25–28, 36, and pl. II.

73. Procopius, as earlier, i, 11–14, 25; ii, 2; iii, 2, ed. H. B. Dewing, 6–11, 14, 20, 32; Anthony Kaldellis, *Prokopios of Caesarea* (Philadelphia, 2004), 143–46 on Antonina.

74. Malalas, *Chronicle*, bk. 13, 39, trans. E. Jeffreys, M. Jeffreys, and R. Scott, *Byzantina Australiensia* 4 (Melbourne, 1986), 187; Procopius, *Buildings*, ed. Dewing, i, 9, 1–10; *Anekdotia*, as earlier, xvii, 5–6, ed. Dewing, 198–99, on Metanoia; Psellos on the later efforts of Michael IV, *Chronographia*, iv, 37, trans. Sewter, 108.

75. Lucian, *The Dialogues of the Courtesans*, ed. and trans. M. D. MacLeod (London/Cambridge, 1961), esp. nos. 6, 7, and 14, where mothers advise their daughters on how to get and keep a man for the highest fee. My thanks to Ruth Webb for the reference and for her brilliant article, “Salome’s Sisters: The Rhetoric and Realities of Dance in Late Antiquity and Byzantium,” in *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (London, 1997), 119–48; eadem, *Devils and Demons: Performance in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA, 2008), esp. 197–216; C. Frugoni, “The Imagined Woman,” *A History of Women in the West*, vol. II, *The Silence of the Middle Ages*, ed. C. Klapisch-Zuber (Cambridge, MA, 1992), 336–421; at 362 she also cites a male-authored text: “Women did not actively commit sins: they were a means of sinning offered to men.”

76. *De ornatu mulierum*, cited in *Le Roman de la Rose* by Jean de Meung; see D. Jacquot and C. Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1985), 112.

77. *Euphemia and the Goth with the Acts of Martyrdom of the Confessors of Edessa*, ed. and trans. F. C. Burkitt (London, 1913), 129–59.

78. Constantinou, as earlier, 167, 186.

79. M. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge, UK, 1974), 3–35.

80. J. Beaucamp, “L’allaitement: mère ou nourrice?,” *JÖB* 32, no. 2 (1982), 549–

58; C. Bourbou and S. J. Garvie-Lok, "Breastfeeding and Weaning Patterns in Byzantine Times," Constantinou and Talbot, as earlier, 65–83.

81. J. Benton, "Trotula, Women's Problems, and the Professionalization of Medicine in the Middle Ages," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 49 (1985), 30–53; M. Green, *The Trotula: An English Translation of the Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine* (Philadelphia, 2001); M.-H. Congourdeau, "Les variations du désir d'enfant à Byzance," in Papaconstantinou and Talbot, as earlier, 35–63.

82. Theodoretos of Kyrrhos, *History of the Monks of Syria*, trans. R. M. Price (Kalamazoo, 1985), with two more women than men.

83. *Ibid.*, ch. 29, 183, though the back-handed compliment, overcoming the evils of Eve, is a common way of praising individual women.

84. *Ibid.*, ch. 30, 186, 187.

85. Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Makrina*, ed. P. Maraval, *Sources chrétiennes* 178 (Paris, 1971); trans. J. Petersen, *Handmaidens of the Lord* (Kalamazoo, 1996); Caseau, "Childhood in Byzantine Saints' Lives," in Papaconstantinou and Talbot, as earlier, 137–39; but note Elizabeth Clark's deconstruction of the text, "The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the Linguistic Turn," *Church History* 67, no. 1 (1998) 1–31; cf. Philip Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford, 1994) 9–11, on this "tendentious" text; and his article, "The Pious Household and the Virgin Chorus: Reflections on Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Macrina*," *JECS* 13, no. 2 (2005), 165–86, emphasizing the fact that in burying Macrina beside Emmelia in the family tomb Gregory was fulfilling their mother's wish, 173.

86. Rebecca Krawiec, "From the Womb of the Church: Monastic Families," *JECS* 11, no. 3 (2003), 283–307.

87. Elm, *Virgins of God* (as earlier).

88. *Ibid.* 263, 215, 374–75.

89. Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers: Sayings, Lives, and Stories of Early Christian Women* (New York, 2003); Marilyn Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism from the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2000), esp. 45–46, on the desert mothers, Amma Theodora, Sarah, and Syncletica.

90. *La Vie ancienne de Saint Syméon Stylite le Jeune*, ed. P van den Ven, 2 vols. (Brussels, 1962–70), I, 93.

91. Constantinou, as earlier, 177; *Life of Theodora of Thessalonike*, para. 9, ed. Alice-Mary Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium* (Washington, DC, 1996), 170.

92. Marie-Hélène Congourdeau, "Les variations du désir d'enfant à Byzance," in Constantinou and Talbot, as earlier, 35–63.

93. Marie-France Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne le Jeune par Étienne le Diacre*, Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs 3 (Aldershot, UK 1997), 92; and see also my analysis in "Women and the Faith in Icons in Early Christianity," [chapter 3](#) in this volume.

94. J. Beaucamp, "Difficile et dissimulée: la rébellion contre la famille à Byzance (4e–7e siècles)," in M.-T. Fögen, ed., *Ordnung und Aufruhr im Mittelalter* (Frankfurt am Main, 1995), 265–86.

95. *The Life of Theophanes*, ed. de Boor, *Theophanes*, 2, 5–6.

96. Anne Alwis, *Continent Marriage in Late Antiquity and Byzantium* (London, 2011).

97. This is generally assumed; see Herrin, "In Search of Byzantine Women: Three Avenues of Approach," [chapter 2](#) in this volume, and Ioli Kalavresou, "When the Virgin Became Mother of God," *DOP* 44 (1990), 165–72.

98. *Protevangelion of James*, paras. 6–8: *Evangelion of Thomas*, paras. 48–50; F. Quere, *Evangelies apocryphes* (Paris, 1983). I thank Aline Rousselle, who drew my attention to the very wide diffusion of these texts in a variety of languages, Arabic, Coptic, Georgian, Armenian, Slavonic, and Latin, indicating their huge popularity.

St. Anne is also portrayed on icons with the Virgin; see *The Hand of Angelos*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Farnham, UK, 2010), no. 44, 190–91; and occasionally as a triple representation with Christ; see *From Byzantium to El Greco: Greek Frescoes and Icons*, ed. Myrtali Acheimastou-Potamianou (Athens, 1987), n. 36, and 171.

99. J. Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Iconographie de l'enfance de la Vierge dans l'Empire byzantin et en Occident* 2e série, vol. XI, fasc. 3, (Brussels, 1964), cited from the 1992 reprint, vol. 2, 183e, which suggests that the Georgian version of the Life of the Virgin by Maximos Confessor might have created the foundation for this idea; see para. 9.

100. Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Iconographie de l'enfance de la Vierge*, vol. 1, 157–58, with the inscription: Ἡ Θεοτόκος διδασκομένη ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ.

101. Il 'Peri tou Biou tes Hyperagias Theotokou' di Epifanio, ed. E. Franceschini, *Studi e Note di Filologia Latina Medievale* (Milan, 1938), 109–28, esp. 113–14.

102. W. Scase, "St. Anne and the Education of the Virgin: Literary and Ascetic Traditions and Their Implications," in *England in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. N. Rogers, Harlaxton Medieval Series, 3 (Stamford, UK, 1993) 81–96, esp. 90–92; Frugoni, "The Imagined Woman," as earlier, 399–400.

103. My thanks to Jeffrey Anderson for reminding me of this image, illustrating the Ode of the Virgin, which is in the Psalter and New Testament, fol. 80v, BZ.1962.35, at Dumbarton Oaks, and to Stephen Zwirn for the precise details.

104. See for example the icon attributed to Angelos Akotantos, Hagia Anna with the Virgin, *The Hand of Angelos*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Farnham, UK, 2010), no. 44, 190–91; and the triple representation with Anna holding the Virgin holding the Christ Child, *From Byzantium to El Greco: Greek Frescoes and Icons*, ed. Myrtali Acheimastou-Potamianou (Athens, 1987), no. 36, and 171. Maria Vassilaki discussed these icons with me most helpfully and I thank her for the catalogue of her exhibition. See also Sharon Gerstel, "Painted Sources for Female Piety in Medieval Byzantium," *DOP* 52 (1998), 89–103, esp. 96–98.

105. I develop this analysis fully in "Women and the Faith in Icons in Early Christianity," [chapter 3](#) in this volume, and in *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium* (Princeton, 2001).

106. While the full critical edition is in preparation, see C. Rognoni, "Le fonds d'archives 'Messine' de l'archivio de Medinaceli (Toledo). Regestes des actes privés grecs," *B 72* (2002), nos. 14 and 83.

107. A. and J. Stylianou, *The Painted Churches of Cyprus*, 2nd ed. (Nicosia, 1997), 116–17, with the image of Nikephoros, *magistros*, holding a model of the church of Asinou, and Yephyra, possibly his wife, shown in smaller scale behind him. The inscription records that she had died in 1099, and the donation was made in 1105/6; C. Jolivet-Levy, *La Cappadoce médiévale: images et spiritualité* (Saint-Leger-Vauban, 2001), 82, drawing of the fresco of Irene and her daughters, Kale and Maria, at Karshi Kilise, Gülshehir, with much less well preserved images of the male donors, husband and sons of Irene. I am grateful to Sophie Métivier for this reference.

108. *ODB*, I, 275.

“FEMINA BYZANTINA”

THE COUNCIL IN TRULLO ON WOMEN



In 1978 Alexander Kazhdan visited London on his way to Dumbarton Oaks and gave a lecture at the Warburg Institute at my invitation. Although I was aware of his work, had read some of his books, and used his study of family names in Byzantium, it was our first meeting—a great moment. We remained in touch, and when the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (ODB) was being planned he insisted on my preparing entries for the topics connected with “family.” He also managed to insert “sexuality,” “prostitution,” “concubinage,” and “bestiality” into this group. When I was invited to contribute to his festschrift I decided to write something about Byzantine women, a topic on which we had clashed during the work for the ODB. The canons of a church council held in 692 referred repeatedly to unsuitable behavior by Byzantine women, suggesting activities that worried the male clerics. Some related to carnival times, when men and women enjoyed dancing, singing, and having a good time; others were quite specifically connected with women, for example, when they wished to mark celebrations for Christmas with a practice connected with the safe birth of a baby boy. Their baking of particular sorts of cakes, which were offered to the new mother, was condemned as quite inappropriate for the Virgin Mary, Mother of God.

Collecting these canons and analyzing their significance brought to light several activities, by implication female, that the male bishops wanted to prevent or reform. Some were familiar and repeated past legislation, suggesting that the activity was still continuing. Others referred to novel developments, which the bishops wished to end. It was interesting to see how frequently women were associated with Jews and heretics and with disorderly and improper behavior, as ecclesiastical authorities perceived it. In addition, the commentaries on the council written nearly 500 years later suggested that these associations had been preserved. Alexander recognized this persistence and over the years I think he began to understand and to share the strong affiliation experienced by some Byzantinists (not only female) with the position of Byzantine women.

Μὴ ἐξέστω ταῖς γυναιξὶ ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τῆς θείας λειτουργίας λαλεῖν
(Do not allow women to speak during the holy liturgy).¹ With this command, followed by a quotation from St. Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians (I Cor. 14.34), the Council in Trullo instructed that women were to remain silent during church services. Canon 70 is typical of clerical attitudes toward women. Yet even in their

predictable prejudice they are interesting, for they contain gender-specific material that is quite rare in Byzantine records. However skewed, such evidence adds to our meager knowledge of Byzantine women. The declarations of the Council in Trullo, for example, indicate quite particular concerns, which can be analyzed to ameliorate what has justly been identified as the “very rare” appearance of women in books on Byzantium.² This study of what the late seventh-century canons can tell us about “femina byzantina” was written as a tribute to the scholar who did so much to make everyday life in Byzantium a serious field of study, Alexander Kazhdan.

In 692 the Council in Trullo, convened by Justinian II, met in the same domed hall of the Great Palace where the Sixth Ecumenical Council had been held ten years earlier.³ More than two hundred bishops from most parts of the empire under secure imperial control assembled in Constantinople to fulfill their given role: to issue disciplinary canons necessary to protect and secure correct observance of the Christian faith. Although no bishops from North Africa participated, the five major sees of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem were represented, and in its address to the emperor the council described itself as ecumenical.

At that time the empire was under serious threat from Arab forces directed from Damascus by Caliph Abd al-Malik. The astonishingly rapid spread of Muslim control in the east Mediterranean, accompanied by the development of a new monotheistic faith, Islam, formed a backdrop to the council’s activities. But Muslim belief, which to the Byzantines was yet another heresy, was not explicitly recorded. While many ways of readmitting penitent heretics were discussed, there is no indication that the bishops addressed the problem of winning back those Christians who had adopted the faith of their Arab conquerors. Since apostasy was encouraged by financial incentives, many had probably abandoned Christianity for Islam. Yet in 692 the question of their return to Orthodox belief was apparently not raised.

Certainty on this matter is unfortunately impossible, because the proceedings of the council are lost. Records must have been kept, but only the opening address by the bishops to the emperor and the text of the actual canons are preserved. All the discussion that preceded the final declarations is missing. If, as seems likely, the bishops proceeded in the manner established at past councils, there would have been much debate on contentious issues, and contemporary developments among the Christian communities under Muslim control might have been one of them. On the other hand, the fact that so few Christian representatives from these areas attended the council meant that very few “expert witnesses” were present. In addition the team responsible for drafting the text of the canons observed the traditional style of

timeless proscription. Contemporary issues, even if they were actually addressed at councils, were more often presented in hallowed ancient forms. For instance, previous condemnation of heresies of the early Christian period was reiterated, even when there was no clear upsurge of such heretical belief.

The timeless quality of the canons was further provoked by the fact that this was the first council for 240 years to add to the accepted body of canon law. Since 451, when the Council of Chalcedon issued thirty canons, ecumenical meetings had been concerned exclusively with Christian dogma. The Fifth and Sixth Councils had been summoned in 553 and 681/82 to deal specifically with wrong belief; no disciplinary matter other than its condemnation had been decreed. So the Trullan Council had to legislate on all the problems that had arisen since the resolutions passed in 451. During this long period much civil legislation had been issued, and many sections of the Code and *Novellae* of Justinian dealt with ecclesiastical matters. The first collections of canon law arranged according to subject had been made, and the *Synagoge* in fifty titles by John Scholastikos initiated the process of uniting canon and civil law that would culminate in the authoritative *Nomocanon* of the ninth century. But by taking all this into consideration, the council removed even further any immediate sense of seventh-century reality from the text of the 692 canons.⁴

In determining what issues required legislation the patriarchal team responsible for planning the council would have established its own priorities. This group was probably responsible for canons that criticized Roman theology and ecclesiastical customs, and those designed to ensure uniform Byzantine practice over disputed matters. Advisers and theologians attached to the imperial court may also have brought forward legal problems, such as remarriage, for an authoritative resolution, but many issues appear to have been raised by individual bishops, who came to Constantinople with their own queries. The regional canons that refer to improper Jewish influence “in the land of the Armenians” were probably raised by local bishops. After discussion, issues were decided and legislation drafted. Where canon law already existed, it was often cited; at most councils it was necessary for old regulations to be repeated. In this way the assembled bishops tried to prevent irregularities and abuse in all aspects of Christian life.

In addition to the canons of past councils, ecumenical and provincial, the so-called Apostolic canons and rulings of the church fathers formed a body of ecclesiastical law that was, in theory, applied by all senior clerics. Whether most bishops in fact understood this material may certainly be doubted. Errors, misunderstandings, and total ignorance among some provincial church leaders is amply

documented in the Trullan canons themselves. In 692 no distinct body of canon law formed an up-to-date guide for church administrators. The council was perhaps summoned partly to correct this situation, and partly to deal with specific problems. But the 102 canons finally decreed reveal concerns that seem to stem from recent anxiety over competing monotheistic faiths, both Judaism and Islam.

Of these canons, thirty are quite new or represent greatly expanded discussion of issues previously regulated by the church (although some had been addressed by civil laws).⁵ That is, nearly one-third of the canons are devoted to new problems or deal with familiar ones in much more detail. Women are featured in several of these, as teenaged girls, married women, mothers, and widows. They also appear in canons on familiar topics, sometimes in rather novel ways. But here I will concentrate on aspects not covered by earlier church legislation.

Ecclesiastical concern about women can be observed in three distinct but overlapping areas: church services, monastic life, and society at large. Such concern was of course constant in medieval societies. But at the end of the seventh century it was intensified by many different regulations, all directed toward the promotion of suitable Christian behavior. The first area is represented by new canons devoted to reforming lay participation in the liturgy. From these, it is evident that seventh-century services were not always conducted properly. Similarly, in the monastic world the strict segregation of the sexes was not regularly observed. Finally, in everyday life people did not always behave in a thoroughly Christian fashion. In all three areas, therefore, the council proposed methods of making people more aware of their obligations as Christians.

First, lay attendance at the liturgy was criticized in several canons. Those who came to church to chant, for instance, were upbraided because "they shout in a disorderly fashion, producing a forced clamor, and even use unauthorized words unsuitable for church" (c. 75). This abuse of both the style and the text employed in chanting is closely related to other canons designed to correct inappropriate Christian behavior in church. People brought gold vessels to church and expected to receive the eucharist in them, instead of in their cupped hands (c. 101). Some of the laity even gave themselves the eucharist when no bishop, priest, or deacon was present (c. 58). Lay people entered the sanctuary (c. 69), tried to expound ecclesiastical dogmas and teach in church (c. 64), read false martyrologies aloud in church (c. 63), and profaned holy shrines by indecent activities (cc. 88, 97).

Irreverent shouting and improper chanting had attracted ecclesiastical censure in the past. At Laodicaea toward the end of the

fourth century chanting was restricted to canonically appointed singers, *psaltai*.⁶ Only the one hundred and fifty recognized psalms in the Old Testament were to be sung; any other texts or psalms were prohibited.⁷ In 692 the latter regulation had to be reiterated and the manner of chanting stipulated. The use of unauthorized texts is clearly related to canon 63 against the public reading of invented, false martyrologies, stories that dishonored the true Christian martyrs and induced lack of faith, *apistia*, in those who heard them.⁸ The council also noted that the clause, “who was crucified for us,” was still chanted, though it had been condemned as an unauthorized addition to the text of the Trisagion hymn,⁹ and forbade it (c. 81).

Canon 64 addressed a related abuse, namely, public teaching and discussion of ecclesiastical dogma by the laity.¹⁰ By appropriating the role of the teacher, *axioma didaskalikon*, in this way lay people transgressed God’s established order, which reserved teaching to those who had received the gift of pedagogy. The laity were reminded that they should never enter the sanctuary, which was reserved for priests, and should certainly not presume to give themselves the eucharist.

In addition, churches were occasionally profaned by people who brought animals into them (c. 88).¹¹ This was expressly forbidden, except in cases of most dire necessity. If a traveler failed to find alternative accommodation and both the animal and owner might die if forced to spend the night outside, they could justify sleeping in the church, but any regular use of consecrated space as accommodation was severely condemned (c. 97).¹² Such profanation was apparently committed by clergy and laity alike—some as married couples, others in different fashions—which showed no respect for churches. Drawing on older regulations concerning eating in church and charitable banquets or love feasts, which also introduced beds or mattresses into a church, the council decreed that all those guilty of thus misusing holy places should be driven out.¹³ This may be related to canons designed to prevent food consumption according to Jewish customs, for example, canon 99 against bringing meat into the sanctuary, which is directed particularly to Christians “in the land of the Armenians.”¹⁴

Among the issues raised by lay behavior in church, one is quite gender-specific: canon 70 forbids women to speak during ecclesiastical services, quoting St. Paul’s well-known instruction for women to be silent in church.¹⁵ Instead, they should be obedient and may consult their husbands at home, if they want to learn anything, “for it is a shame [*aischron*] for a woman to speak in church” (I Cor. 14.34–35). This marks the culmination of a long process of excluding women from active participation in the liturgy. In the early Christian centuries women had preached, prophesied, taught, and expounded scripture.¹⁶ At the Council of Laodicaea, however, those who had done so as so-

called *presbytidas* or *prokathemenas* had been denied this role, and were therefore barred from the sanctuary.¹⁷ Female believers continued to participate in lay parts of the liturgy, primarily the responses, the creed, and certain chants and prayers, until the Trullan bishops further restricted their activity in church by ordering them to remain silent. They were thus reduced to mere spectators and hearers.¹⁸ Such a firm denial of the public expression of Christian faith by women could only drive them into other forms of devotion. Of course, they could attend the liturgy as onlookers, but it was in more intimate relations with the holy, such as icon veneration, that they found a way of proving their commitment.¹⁹ Their pursuit of Christian ideals could still be followed in domestic contexts, both within the home and in social work and welfare, but it was always an individual one, peripheral to the ordered ecclesiastical life of the church. While many female Byzantine saints displayed a dedication to the relief of poverty and illness, the contrast between their activity and the great variety of fields open to their male equivalents reveals what very limited possibilities existed for women.²⁰

Second, among the canons devoted to monasticism, several reveal that seventh-century women pursued a commitment to celibacy as teenaged girls, older women, or widows. One new regulation relates purely to female dedication, while others apply equally to men and women. The first and most important is canon 45, concerned with the appropriate dress to be worn when women take their vows.²¹ It particularly attacks those who present candidates in silks and other fine robes, decorated with gold and a variety of precious stones. They approach the altar of the monastic church decked out in immense wealth, which they remove, in order to receive the ceremony of blessing and put on the black habit of the nun. The bishops declare: "It is not pious for a woman who has chosen of her own free will to abandon the world and all its charms ... to enter a nunnery [attired] in such a way that recalls the world's most transitory nature which she had already forgotten." She might become hesitant, disturbed, and even weep a little. "And then witnesses might believe her tears sprang from the fact of leaving the world and worldly things rather than from her own commitment to the ascetic struggle." So this practice must cease.

Obviously, some parents had been encouraging their daughters to take their vows wearing extremely rich apparel. But this tradition probably stemmed from acts of self-dedication recorded in early Christian martyrologies, where women declared themselves betrothed to Christ. Young girls who wished to remain celibate regularly used this argument to avoid an arranged marriage, for example, Justa, who "made Christ alone her successful suitor and lord."²² And numerous

cases document their experience of a spiritual marriage, accompanied by all the actions and vocabulary of a secular wedding, including ritual washing, anointing with oil, dressing, wearing both wedding rings and crowns, even with the notion of marriage and celestial bedchambers. The *Lives* of the Persian martyr Martha and of St. Febronia provide telling examples of this vocabulary.²³ A comparable preparation is recorded in acts of martyrdom, when women took their daughters to their deaths as “brides of Christ” dressed in regular marriage gowns.²⁴ Women continued to commit their virginity to Christ in ceremonies that established the spiritual equivalent of marriage and dressed as if for a wedding.

Twelfth-century commentators on this canon reveal that it had no great success in curbing the use of elaborate and expensive dresses. Theodore Balsamon uses the key adverb, *nymphikos*, like a bride, and complains that people regularly transgressed this canon.²⁵ Byzantine families, parents, sponsors, and candidates for nunneries all conspired to make the ceremony of monastic dedication a rich and sumptuous affair. For them, too, the ceremony took the place of a secular wedding on which considerable family resources were regularly expended.

Another situation particular to women is treated in canon 48, which tackles the awkward problem of what to do with a priest’s wife if he is elevated to the episcopacy.²⁶ Since the lower clergy remained married at their ordination, and were enjoined not to separate from their wives (a regulation repeated at Trullo, c. 13), married men could become bishops. But in order to hold this high office they had to be celibate (another rule reiterated in c. 12). This meant that their wives had to agree to dissolve their marriages in order to free their husbands for episcopal duties.²⁷ While the council took care not to presume their agreement, it decreed that priests in this position should try to persuade their spouses to enter nunneries in distant regions. Nunneries were considered a suitable environment for ex-wives, who might attain the rank of deaconess if they proved worthy. Their husband also had to give an undertaking both to support them and to avoid any further contact with their ex-wives. But if they were unsuccessful, they could not become bishops.²⁸

A particular case was also discussed in canon 12. The council had learned that bishops in Africa, Libya, and other places continued to live with their wives after consecration.²⁹ It forcefully reminded them of the scandal they were causing, and decreed that the practice must stop immediately because it set a bad example to the faithful and brought ecclesiastical discipline into disrepute. Quoting St. Paul again, it ordered that bishops who continued living with their wives were to be deposed. Although nothing was said about wives who agreed to

leave their husbands, they presumably followed the new regulation of canon 48.

This group of canons reflects Byzantine unease on the question of clerical celibacy. In contrast to the Roman demand for celibate priests, the Eastern Church had always upheld the sanctity of marriage, even for men later ordained to the priesthood. Only a decade earlier, during the Sixth Ecumenical Council, attended by a large and well-informed delegation from Rome, differences over celibacy and fasting had become plain. At Trullo respect for the Christian sacrament of marriage was reaffirmed, but at the same time ancient regulations against inappropriate marriages—so defined because they involved a second marriage for either party, or unacceptable marriage partners (that is, prostitutes, household slaves, entertainers)—were repeated in canon 3. Such clerics had to dissolve their unions, and once ordained they were not allowed to marry (c. 6). So while the council emphasized the indissoluble nature of marriage, it was moving steadily toward clerical celibacy and tighter regulation of the permitted type of marriage, leaving the wives of ordained men in a very ambiguous position.

Such contradictory pressures had caused some priests to repudiate their wives on the pretext of piety, but this had always been condemned. In 692 ancient canons were repeated, and clerics who refused to sustain their marriages were threatened with deposition (c. 13).³⁰ Canon 30 raised the question of priests in barbarian churches, *en tais barbarikais ekklesiis*,³¹ who agreed by mutual consent to abstain from conjugal relations. Although this was strictly against the Apostolic canon cited in canon 13, the council felt that it could justify a certain leniency because these priests lost confidence living among “strange and unsettled customs.” While no location for the barbarian churches is given, in canon 39 the “heathen” who make “barbarian incursions” on Cyprus are clearly Arabs.³² Three other decisions affect church leaders who fail to hold a regular annual synod, priests who abandon their churches because of barbarian incursions (or for any other reason), and bishops who have been prevented from occupying their sees by barbarian invasions.³³ Although the identity of the barbarians is only identified once, Muslim occupation may be implied in the others. While canon 30 is often understood as a reference to areas of the West under Roman control, where the Roman tradition of celibate priests applied,³⁴ it could also relate to eastern provinces of the empire that had been overrun by the Arabs during the second half of the seventh century. There, under Muslim control, Christian priests might well suffer a lack of courage; they might try to demonstrate their commitment to the faith by separating from their wives—“going beyond the law,” as the council puts it. In the twelfth century, when

Balsamon wanted to identify barbarian churches, he consulted bishops from Russia who confirmed that the metropolis of Alania was a barbarian place where this canon was not observed.³⁵

Whatever the area, the council decreed that priests serving in these barbarian churches should cease to cohabit in any way with their spouses, as proof of their piety and to counteract their lack of courage and faintheartedness, *ten tes gnomes mikropsychian*. Of their wives there is no further word, but they were presumably classified together with ex-wives of bishops and obliged to enter nunneries. In his commentary Theodore Balsamon is critical of this canon; he does not believe it is right to force a wife to leave the conjugal house, citing the Apostolic canon and a law of Justinian.³⁶

Two additional canons, 46 and 47, incorporate civilian laws governing nuns and reveal the council's insistence that dedicated women, like men, should remain in their communities and avoid going out. If urgent need forced them to leave, they should do so only with the blessing and authorization of the abbess and only accompanied by some of the older nuns, *meta tinon presbytidon kai proteuouson*. These terms recall those previously used for women ordained to a function equivalent to the male presbyter.³⁷ The next regulation attempts to protect nuns while they are absent from their communities by prohibiting their stay overnight in male monasteries.³⁸ Monks are similarly ordered never to pass the night in a nunnery. The faithful are ordered to remain beyond all sin or scandal, living according to "that which is comely," that they may "attend upon the Lord without distraction" (I Cor. 7.35). These two regulations clearly fit into the pattern of ecclesiastical efforts to extend greater control over dedicated women and men.³⁹

Third, the remaining canons specific to women concern social activities in general. Their purpose is evidently to curb any public expression of licentiousness, immorality, or un-Christian behavior. Under this rubric, it seems, ancient pagan traditions still provided an excuse for unsuitable festivities, even in the seventh century. Whether at the public baths or at the Hippodrome, women were at risk, especially when they bathed with men or with Jews, or attended the spectacles and entertainments that usually accompanied horse racing and Hippodrome games. Of course, Christians had repeatedly been warned not to take part in such events, even when they were held in connection with private celebrations.⁴⁰ Dancing at weddings was singled out at Laodicea, and the dangers of theatrical dances, *tas episkenes orcheseis*, at Trullo,⁴¹ but the council also stipulated in more precise detail what Christians must avoid.

According to canon 62, the most offensive occasions occurred at the so-called Kalends, the Bota, Brumalia, and celebrations of March 1st

and the grape harvest, when the sight of “women dancing in public can cause much outrage and damage, and even worse, the dances and mystic rites performed by both men and women, in the name of those falsely called gods by the pagans, according to an ancient custom and one directly contrary to Christian life.”⁴² During these rites men and women exchanged clothes; wore masks related to the comic, tragic, and satyr plays; invoked the name of Dionysos when pressing grapes or pouring wine; and acted as if possessed by pagan demons. Those found guilty would be punished by deposition if they were clerics, and by anathematization for the laity.

But the bishops appear most anxious to prevent public dancing by women, especially if they are dressed in men’s clothes or otherwise disguised. At the early fourth-century council of Gangra, women who dressed as men or cut off their hair had been denounced, but this occurred in the context of a fervent ascetic movement led by Eustathios of Sebasteia.⁴³ At Trullo, the bishops attacked a long tradition of marking seasonal festivals by offensive and immoral pagan celebrations, to which people, clergy included, seemed deeply attached. Any pretext for carnival-style festivities was now singled out for condemnation. Every new moon, for example, gave people an excuse for lighting bonfires in front of their houses and jumping over them, an ancient way of ensuring good luck.⁴⁴ If this involved women, it would clearly come very close to dancing in public.

In canon 61 entertainers are criticized more explicitly than ever before. People who lead she-bears and other animals around are here associated with fortune-tellers, those who claim to be able to predict the future whether from clouds, charms, incantations, or oracles.⁴⁵ Consulting a soothsayer, sorcerer, fortune-teller, astrologer, or anyone else who claimed to foresee the future, or who made protective amulets, had often been condemned.⁴⁶ But obviously it continued, and in the seventh century anyone who perpetrated destructive pagan customs in this way was to be expelled from the church. This was justified as a means of protecting the most simple-minded, *oi haplousteroi*, who might otherwise be deceived.

Indeed, the council states repeatedly that it aims to protect precisely this category of people who are most at risk from tricksters, seducers, and other corrupting influences. In canon 96 very elaborate or fancy hairstyles are blamed for the destruction of weak or unstable souls, so Christian men are ordered not to arrange their hair in a seductive fashion.⁴⁷ And since this is directed against men, it evident that women are likely to be caught in the trap. Similarly, paintings on wood or pictures on other surfaces that “stimulate bodily sensation corrupt the spirit, and light the flames of impure desire” are not to be permitted.⁴⁸ Those responsible for producing such pictures must be

excommunicated. A comparable concern is clear in canon 73, which forbids the placing of the cross on church floors, where it might be trodden underfoot.⁴⁹

Even in Christian paintings of the most established and approved variety the council recommends greater clarity. Canon 82 specifies that instead of the Lamb of God, as shown in paintings with John the Baptist pointing to it, Jesus shall henceforth be portrayed in his full humanity in order to emphasize the significance of the incarnation.⁵⁰ Painters are therefore instructed to show him as a man, in the flesh, to recall to beholders his suffering and saving death, and the redemption thus wrought for the world. Although the simple-minded, uneducated, poorer people are not named as an object of this regulation, it is obviously addressed to those who might not fully understand the symbolic representation of the lamb. A more direct commemoration of Christ's human existence is therefore recommended.

An extremely interesting problem is addressed in canon 68, directed against the corruption or destruction of Bibles by "anyone who cuts up any of the books of the Old or New Testament ... or hands them over to be destroyed by booksellers [*bibliokapelois*] or by the so-called perfumers [*myrepsois*] or by any of the other merchants."⁵¹ Both the person found handing over books and the recipient will be anathematized for one year, unless the books are kept for personal instruction or given to someone who can restore them. Who are the *bibliokapelois* and why are they associated with perfumers (or so-called perfumers, who might in fact be something else)? From twelfth-century commentators, it's clear that while they complain of shortages of parchment, their chief concern is the reuse of Bibles. They are against removing biblical texts to create reusable parchment. But was the seventh-century church really concerned with the disrespect implied by such reuse? Or was it worried about heretics corrupting biblical texts with skillful alterations? Possibly the merchants denounced were actively soliciting Christian texts in order to promote a different sort of reading matter, non-Christian learning, philosophical discourse. In the late sixth century people who frequented booksellers in Constantinople were interested in ancient learning.⁵² At Trullo the classification of booksellers with perfume manufacturers and merchants may provide a clue, since the church considered the latter a disreputable lot, who pandered to the vanity of women, together with hairdressers. Were these unscrupulous merchants importuning ignorant people for biblical manuscripts in the manner of Aladdin's lamp? Were they trying to make money out of holy texts or to corrupt them with heretical changes?

In another area the council expressed its anxiety that people were fraternizing too closely with Jews.⁵³ This was by no means a new

matter; since the fourth century bishops had been warning against the dangers of participating in Jewish feasts, primarily the Passover, eating their unleavened bread, and generally following their customs.⁵⁴ In the late seventh century additional aspects were cited: calling on Jewish doctors and using their medicine, bathing in the company of Jews, or simply getting too familiar with them (*prosoikeioustho*). Clergy and laity alike were guilty. These prohibitions may be related to theological differences with the Christians in Armenia who had accepted considerable Jewish influence. Their practices are condemned on more than one occasion, and range from questions of spiritual leadership to the consumption of meat slaughtered by strangulation and the bringing of meat into churches.⁵⁵ In 692 the bishops appear to have wanted to check a novel avenue of Judaic influence.

One final aspect, which reflects on women and those who were ignorant of canon law, concerns illegitimate forms of marriage. These are treated in canon 98, devoted to the seduction of girls already engaged during their fiancé's lifetime,⁵⁶ and canon 53, on the remarriage of widows to men who had stood godfather to their children at baptism.⁵⁷ Both are gender-specific, in that they are addressed to men who try to impose illegitimate marriages on women who have already declared their marital intentions or their spiritual connections. Because the spiritual kinship forged at baptism is of a higher order than its physical equivalent, those who are spiritually related may not marry. The network of relationships thus established also creates new impediments to marriage and an additional category of prohibited unions, including the marriage of a godfather to the widowed mother of his godchildren. A fuller list is given in canon 54, which declares the need to be considerably more specific than St. Basil.⁵⁸

But the canon that seems to reflect most ecclesiastical anxiety for ignorant souls, frequently female, is number 79.⁵⁹ This condemns people for preparing and eating a special dish of *semidalis* (a sweet cereal mixture) in honor of the Virgin on the day after the feast of Christ's birth. By this custom the secular tradition of congratulating a mother after the successful delivery of a child was transplanted into the church. Although women were not specifically condemned for the development, it seems more than likely that they were responsible. The bishops of 692 forcefully denounced the practice as quite incorrect and inappropriate. They declared that since the Virgin had conceived miraculously and suffered no pain in childbirth, she could not be celebrated as a normal mother. The custom, therefore, had to cease.

These new rules were amplified by the repetition of older gender-

specific regulations against women who procured abortions, abandoned children, or remarried illegally, traditional grounds for mistrusting women. In 692 the bishops added further justification for their low opinion, based on female behavior in public during ancient ceremonies or novel Christian ones. At best women were ranked among the simple-minded, who needed protection from corrupt and wicked men or vagrant monks;⁶⁰ at worst, they constituted an equally dangerous tendency toward un-Christian behavior in society. The two polar oppositions meant that women were perceived as a source of both innocence and corruption.

This fear of female potential and determination to keep women under control is typical of medieval societies. In late seventh-century Byzantium it may also have been strengthened by Christian awareness of Muslim attitudes and the stringent Islamic regulation of women. Within the Byzantine Christian tradition, women could be seen as paragons of virtue, virgins, saintly mothers, and holy widows. But as prostitutes, licentious young girls who would seduce married men and monks, or ordinary women who simply enjoyed dancing in public, jumping over bonfires or cross-dressing, they represented what the church understood as a definite threat to its social control and order. Hence the double-edged appreciation of women in Byzantium. The negative side is most clearly represented by the church in canons such as these. But ecclesiastical condemnation was balanced by a genuine appreciation of individual Byzantine mothers, wives, and daughters expressed by their male relatives. Despite occasionally exaggerated praise, distorted by rhetorical concerns, individual writers express a positive attitude toward women, once they were enclosed within family life. There they might perpetuate the ideal of Christian service, loving their husbands and their children as instructed.

However, since female forms of self-expression remain extremely rare in Byzantium, it is the male view of women that predominates. While this constitutes a serious limitation, gender-specific evidence about Byzantine women can still yield new insights. And the evidence provided by the Trullan council, while it is rooted in the late seventh century, continued to influence later developments. The canons were incorporated into the *Nomocanon*, the most important medieval compilation of civilian and ecclesiastical laws, and continued to provoke serious consideration into the fourteenth century and beyond. So this information, however distant from Byzantine women's self-expression, documents another aspect of their daily lives. It adds a further dimension to the framework of feminine existence, and thus forms one more component in the ongoing study of *homo byzantinus*.⁶¹

Since this contribution was written in the summer of 1990, several important works have appeared on closely related subjects. In particular, Heinz Ohme has published *Das Concilium Quinisextum und seine Bischofsliste* (Berlin/New York, 1990), and “Der Terminus $\chi\omega\rho\alpha$ als “Provinzbezeichnung” in synodalen Bischofslisten des 6.–8. Jahrhunderts,” *BZ* 82 (1989), 191–201. V. Déroche and G. Dagron have studied Christian-Jewish polemic in the seventh century, and I. Sorlin has examined the terms for female demons, all in *TM* 11 (1991). J. F. Haldon’s book, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century* (Cambridge, UK, 1990), provides valuable details of practices condemned by the council, for example, 333–40.

NOTES

1. Council in Trullo, c. 70: G. A. Ralles and M. Potles, eds., *Syntagma ton theion kai ieron kanonon*, II (Athens, 1852), 467; P. P. Joannou, *Discipline générale antique*, I (Vatican, 1962), 208 (with Lat. and Fr. trans.); H. R. Percival, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, XIV (Oxford/New York, 1900), 396 (Eng. trans.). The Greek text is also printed in *Mansi*, XI, and in V. N. Benešević, *Drevne-Slavjanskaja Kormčaya* (St. Petersburg, 1906). In the following notes I give page references to Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*; Joannou (the most recent edition); and Percival. **Update** See the reprint of Joannou’s Greek and Latin texts, corrected, and Eng. trans., George Nedungatt and Michael Featherstone, eds., *The Council in Trullo Revisited*, *Kanonika* 6 (1995), with several important studies.

2. A. P. Kazhdan and G. Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium* (Washington, DC, 1982), 20.

3. In general, see J. Pargoire, *L’église byzantine de 527 à 847* (Paris, 1923), 199–236; Judith Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom* (Princeton, 1987), 284–88.

4. The council does not refer explicitly to the *Nomocanon* of the early seventh century, compiled by the so-called Enantiophanes or Younger Anonymous, and felt the need to issue a codifying canon (c. 2). When the bishops record their reaction to particular disorders, it is possible that they refer to relatively recent developments (for example, cc. 30, 99). The significance of these references, as a pointer to seventh-century reality, requires further investigation. **Update** Clarence Gallagher, *Church Law and Church Order in Rome and Byzantium: A Comparative Study*, Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs, vol. 8 (Aldershot, UK, 2002).

5. For reasons of space it will not be possible to analyze these civilian regulations here. **Update** The inheritance of canons issued by the Council of Chalcedon is addressed in Judith Herrin, “The Acts of Trullo (692) as a Continuation of Chalcedon,” in *Chalcedon in Context: Church Councils 400–700*, ed. Richard Price and Mary Whitby (Liverpool, UK, 2009), 148–68.

6. Laodicaea, c. 15; Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, III, 184; Joannou, I, ii, 136.

7. Laodicaea, c. 59, with the list of approved biblical books to be used in church (sometimes separated to form c. 60); Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, III, 225–26; Joannou, I, ii, 154–55.

8. Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 452; Joannou, I, 200; Percival, 394.

9. In 476/77; see V. Grumel, *Les actes des patriarches (381–715)*, I, *Regestes*, I, rev. ed. by J. Darrouzès (Paris, 1972), nos. 150, 151.

10. Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 453–54; Joannou, I, 201–2; Percival, 394.

11. Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 511; Joannou, I, 224–25; Percival, 403.

12. Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 536; Joannou, I, 234–35; Percival, 406.

13. Laodicaea, c. 28; Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, III, 195; Joannou, I, ii, 142, repeated at Trullo, c. 74; Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 476; Joannou, I, 212; Percival, 398.

14. Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 543; Joannou, I, 235–36; Percival, 407. **Update** Michel van Esbroeck, “Le discours du Catholicos Sahak III en 691,” in Nedungatt and Featherstone, *The Council in Trullo*, note 1 earlier, 323–454, which deals with all the Armenian issues and provides a French translation of the Armenian texts relative to differences raised by the Council in Trullo.

15. See note 1 earlier; R. Gryson, *Le ministère des femmes dans l’église ancienne* (Gembloux, 1972), 27–29, accepts that these two verses are an interpolation, to be attributed to a Judeo-Christian milieu. Whether they are really foreign to St. Paul’s thinking on women or not, they were certainly accepted as authentic by later theologians.

16. Jo Ann MacNamara, *A New Song: Celibate Women in the Three Christian Centuries* (New York, 1983); E. Schüssler Fiorenza, “Word, Spirit and Power: Women in Early Christian Communities,” in *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. R. Ruether and E. McLaughlin (New York, 1979), 29–70; Gryson, *Le ministère*, 20–40.

17. Laodicaea, cc. II, 44; Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, III, 181, 212; Joannou, I, ii, 135, 148; cf. Gryson, as earlier, 92–95.

18. G. Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Westminster, MD, 1945), 483–84, 486–88, 511–16.

19. Judith Herrin, “Women and the Faith in Icons in Early Christianity,” [chapter 3](#) in this volume.

20. Judith Herrin, “Public and Private Forms of Religious Commitment among Byzantine Women,” [chapter 6](#) in this volume.

21. Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 411–12; Joannou, I, 182–84; Percival, 386–87.

22. P. Wilson-Kaster et al., eds., *A Lost Tradition: Women Writers of the Early Church* (Washington, DC, 1981), 149. (This incomplete text, a martyrdom of St. Cyprian of Antioch by Eudokia, is in fact a martyrdom of Justa/Justina.)

23. S. Brock and S. Ashbrook-Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient* (Berkeley/London, 1987), 70–71, 165.

24. See, for instance, Ruhm and her three daughters, martyrs of Najran, Brock-Harvey, as earlier, 112–13.

25. Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 412–13.

26. Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 419; Joannou, I, 186; Percival, 388. **Update** C. Pitsakis, “Clergé marié et célibat dans la législation du Concile in Trullo: le point de vue oriental,” in Nedungatt and Featherstone, 263–306.

27. This type of voluntary separation constituted a divorce by mutual consent, *bona gratia*; see P. L’Huillier, “L’Attitude de l’Eglise orthodoxe vis-à-vis du remariage des divorcés,” *Revue du droit canonique* 29 (1979), 44–49, esp. 48 n. 19 on Balsamon’s comments and evidence of the canon’s continuing application. Cf. J. Zhishman, *Das Eherecht der orientalischen Kirche* (Vienna, 1864), 780–81 and n. 2. **Update** Angeliki E. Laiou, *Marriage, amour et parenté à Byzance aux XIe–XIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1992), 134–36.

28. Zhishman, *Eherecht*, 460–67, 778–83.

29. Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 330–31; Joannou, I, 138–39; Percival, 370. Cf. Zhishman, *Eherecht*, 462–64.

30. Zhishman, *Eherecht*, 451–59. **Update** Gallagher, *Church Law and Church Order*, 66–72.

31. Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 369; Joannou, I, 160–61; Percival, 379; cf. H. C. Lea, *An Historical Sketch of Sacerdotal Celibacy in the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1884), 89–90; R. Gryson, *Les origines du célibat ecclésiastique* (Gembloux, 1970), 117–18, 120. **Update** Vittorio Peri, “Le Chiese nell’Impero e le Chiese “tra i Barbari”—la territorialità ecclesiale nella riforma trullana,” in Nedungatt and Featherstone, 199–213.

32. Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 395–96; Joannou, I, 173–74; Percival, 383; this describes the emigration of John, bishop of Cyprus, with his flock to the province of Hellespont, where he was established as bishop of Nea Justinianopolis. Cf. F. R. Trombley, “The Council in Trullo (691–692): A Study of Canons Relating to Paganism, Heresy, and the Invasions,” *Comitatus* 9 (1978), 1–18, esp. 13–15. **Update** See H. Ohme, *Das Concilium Quinisextum und seine Bischofsliste* (Berlin/New York, 1990), 209–10, on the broader significance of this move, which upset the established hierarchy of bishops.

33. Canons 8, 18, and 37: Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 324–5, 344, and 388; Joannou, I, 135–36, 149–50, and 171–72; Percival, 369, 374, 382. Canon 16 of Sardica, against the prolonged stay of clerics in the metropolis of Thessalonike, concerns a similar abuse but not the same reason: Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, III, 272; Joannou, I, ii, 183.

34. If so, the “barbarian churches” should be placed in southern Italy, Sicily, and the diocese of Eastern Illyricum embracing the Balkans, Greece, and the Aegean islands, which remained formally under Rome until the eighth century. **Update** But see now the arguments of H. Ohme in favor of an earlier transfer, *Concilium Quinisextum übersetzt und eingeleitet* (Turnhout, 2006), 28–29.

35. Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 370.

36. *Ibid.*, II, 370–71: “the Justinianic novel which does not permit the dissolution of marriage by mutual consent” (that is, Novel 117, 10).

37. Trullo, c. 46: Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 414; Joannou, I, 184–85; Percival, 387; cf. note 17 earlier.

38. Canon 47: Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 416; Joannou, I, 185–86; Percival, 387.

39. Cf. cc. 41 and 42, for instance, which insist upon regular monastic training for solitaries and so-called hermits.

40. Laodicaea, c. 54: Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, III, 220, Joannou, I, ii, 152; repeated at Trullo, c. 24: Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 356; Joannou, I, 155; Percival, 376.

41. Laodicaea, c. 53: Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, III, 219; Joannou, I, ii, 151; Trullo, 51; Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 424–25; Joannou, I, 188–89; Percival, 388.

42. Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 448; Joannou, I, 198–200, esp. 198.16–199.5; Percival, 393. Cf. R. Browning, “Theodore Balsamon’s Commentary on the Canons of the Council in Trullo ...,” in *Praktika tou A’ Diethnous Symposiou: E kathemerine zoe sto Byzantio* (Athens, 1989), 421–27. **Update** Eunice Dauterman Maguire and Henry Maguire, *Other Icons, Art and Power in Byzantine Secular Culture* (Princeton/Oxford, 2007), 145–56.

43. Gangra, cc. 13, 17: Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, III, 109, 113; Joannou, I, ii, 94–95, 96.

44. Canon 65: Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 456–57; Joannou, I, 203–4; Percival, 394–95. For evidence of twelfth-century elaboration, see Theodore’s Balsamon’s commentary, Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 459–60; A. P. Kazhdan and Ann Wharton Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture* (Berkeley, 1985), 239–40; Browning, “Theodore Balsamon’s Commentary,” 421–22.

45. Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 442–43; Joannou, I, 196–98; Percival, 393.

46. Ancyra, c. 24 (against people who consult diviners in the pagan fashion): Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, III, 66; Joannou, I, ii, 72. Laodicea, c. 36 (against Christian priests who use sorcery and magic, and make amulets): Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, III, 203; Joannou, I, ii, 145.
47. Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 533; Joannou, I, 233–34; Percival, 406. Zonaras comments that in his day men continued to dye their hair, but he regards shaving as an even more deplorable Western habit: Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 534–35; cf. Browning, “Theodore Balsamon’s Commentary,” 425–26.
48. Canon 100: Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 545; Joannou, I, 236–37; Percival, 407. **Update** Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era ca. 680–ca. 850: A History* (Cambridge, UK, 2011), 779–80, 784; Maguire and Maguire, *Other Icons*, 106–8.
49. Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 474; Joannou, I, 211; Percival, 398. **Update** Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 140–41.
50. Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 492–93; Joannou, I, 218–20; Percival, 401. Cf. D. Freedberg, *The Power of Images* (Chicago/London, 1989), 206–7, 211–12. **Update** There is a vast literature on this famous canon, most recently summarized in Brubaker and Haldon, as earlier, 61–62, 91.
51. Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 463–64; Joannou, I, 206–7; Percival, 396. Cf. N. Wilson, “Books and Readers in Byzantium,” in *Byzantine Books and Bookmen* (Washington, DC, 1975), 2. **Update** Judith Herrin, “Book Burning as Purification in Early Byzantium,” chapter 15 in *Margins and Metropolis: Authority across the Byzantine Empire* (Princeton, 2013).
52. Agathias, *Historiae*, 2.29, ed. R. Keydell, *CFHB* (Berlin, 1967), 78.
53. Canon 11, Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 238–39; Joannou, I, 237–38; Percival, 370.
54. Laodicea, cc. 37, 38: Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, III, 206; Joannou, I, ii, 146.
55. Canon 33, against hereditary priesthood: Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 379; Joannou, I, 166–67; Percival, 381. Canon 99, against cooking and eating meat in church: Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 543; Joannou, I, 235–36; Percival, 407 (both qualified as Judaizing, *ioudaikos*).
56. Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 538–39; Joannou, I, 235; Percival, 406. Cf. K. Ritzler, *Le mariage dans les églises chrétiennes* (Paris, 1970), 129, 180, 183–84.
57. Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 428–29; Joannou, I, 189–90; Percival, 390. Cf. Zhishman, *Eherecht*, 265–69.
58. Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 432; Joannou, I, 190–92; Percival, 390–91.
59. Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 486–87; Joannou, I, 215–16; Percival, 399.
60. Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma*, II, 406; Joannou, I, 180; Percival, 385; cf. H. –G. Beck, *Byzantinisches Erotikon* (Munich, 1986), 70–71.
61. I should like to thank Dr. Bernard Stolte and the Law Faculty of Gronigen University for inviting me to present a paper based on this material in May 1989, and members of the seminar, particularly Drs. A. Palmer and H. Drijvers, for their valuable comments. In addition, I am most grateful to Dr. Stolte, for his elucidation of the complicated early redactions of the *Nomocanon*.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FORMS OF RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT AMONG BYZANTINE WOMEN



My interest in adapting the then current feminist theory to Byzantine evidence grew out of the meetings of the Groningen feminist group that took place in the 1980s. The public/private divide may have been too strongly emphasized, but it had the merit of forcing historians to reexamine the many paths by which Christian belief and practice developed. There were spheres for men—running the church and its major institutions including monasteries—and those for women—in female monasteries or much less significant roles within churches (lighting lamps, removing spent candles, sweeping the floor, and so on).

Byzantium, like most ancient and medieval societies, was obviously patriarchal, and the power of the father dominated the lives of women. In investigating the public/private divide it was helpful to take a closer look at the female life cycle and to identify any moments at which women could break free of their father's power and society's expectations. These occurred at puberty, when most families planned to marry their daughters, or at widowhood, when a married woman might refuse another arrangement and remain *univira*, a woman faithful to one man. Male clerics can be seen to have encouraged this practice, which sometimes resulted in benefits to the church (increased legacies, funds for prayers to be said at the tomb of the deceased husband, and distributions of money, clothing, and foodstuffs to the poor).

An enormous amount of research has been published on this topic in recent years, and most historians now avoid too strict a separation between private and public space. Jinty Nelson points out that court and convent were both public spaces: "Gender often confounds the very distinction between public and private." The female life cycle still remains one feature of women's lives that tends to dominate, even today, in debates over the promotion of married women with families. Women may now be ordained as priests in the Church of England, but there is stubborn opposition to the acceptance of women bishops. Occasionally, it's good to be reminded that these battles were fought before, to show how women gained the right to worship in their own ways, in Byzantium using icons of holy people.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS CHAPTER is to examine the development of the different forms of religious commitment expressed by women who lived in the Byzantine Empire between the sixth and eleventh centuries AD—a development predicated on their gradual exclusion from displays of public religiosity. Over this long period, as the church consolidated its organization through an administration grafted on to Roman imperial government, the ecclesiastical hierarchy of male

bishops effectively excluded women from prominent public positions. This development can be traced through canonical rulings laid down at ecumenical and local church councils, which defined the Christian practice appropriate for women. It is also documented by women's participation in religious activities as recorded in a variety of sources, especially the lives of female saints.

In this process of exclusion, the seventh century marks an important stage. At the Council in Trullo held in 692 in Constantinople, restrictions additional to those that already existed on the public behavior of women were decreed.¹ The long-term consequences of these measures can be seen in the more private forms of devotion adopted by Byzantine women in the following medieval centuries.

In order to investigate this process it is necessary to examine the legacy of early Christian practice and the models of female religious commitment inherited by Byzantine women. This forms the first section. It is also essential to establish the pattern of female life structures in the Byzantine period, within which women expressed their religiosity. These two sections precede the analysis of the gradual restriction of public roles for women and the growth of private forms of worship. It must be said, however, that a central problem exists in analyzing the inheritance from the early Christian period. It is preserved in the generally misogynistic terms of male authors, who reveal their assumptions and self-consciousness clearly.² Unfortunately, very little written by women survives to reveal female self-consciousness. The account by Perpetua of her arrest and prison-stay as she awaited death is a notable exception, although modified by the male scribe who wrote it down after her martyrdom. In the main, early Christian writings must be interpreted within the context of the then-prevailing patriarchal mentality, which displays distinctly deprecating distrust of women.³

LEGACY AND MODELS

From earliest Christian times, women held a prominent place among those who followed Jesus and believed in him. He in turn accepted the service of Mary Magdalene, the reformed prostitute, and praised the faith of women, a faith that might procure miraculous cures. In addition to those women mentioned in the Gospel stories, St. Paul recommended certain women to his correspondents, again in terms of their exemplary faith and service to the new religion. Through these New Testament stories women in later centuries learned of the importance attached to certain women by the founding fathers of their

faith.

In both East and West, women devoted themselves to Christian practices even to the point of courting death, as did the slave girl Blandina at Lyon in 177, Febronia in fourth-century Nisibis, or Serena who incurred the antagonism of pagan senators in fifth-century Rome.⁴ Through this commitment to the faith, four distinct roles for women developed in the early Christian period: that of martyr, dedicated virgin, women who served as *ministrae*, and those who acted as patrons of the faith. Of these, the martyrs occupied a very special place as women who suffered, like men, for their belief. Only under persecution could women realize an equality with men; neither the imperial authorities nor Christians themselves recognized any difference of sex in this context of suffering. Their stories were familiar and are known to have inspired Christian women of later centuries.

As persecution declined during the fourth century, this glorious aspect of equality was removed, although martyrdom remained a significant concept. It continued to inspire young women in fourth- and fifth-century Persia, or early sixth-century Najran, who expressed an intense desire to embrace the same fate, going joyfully to Roman, Magian, or Jewish tortures of the most humiliating and overtly sexual variety.⁵ Their steadfastness in the face of a depraved cruelty, while shocking to onlookers of most religious persuasions, deeply impressed other Christians. The female martyr had become a model for later generations of Christian women.

Similarly, women who dedicated themselves to Christ, often at a young age, established a model of virginity that was to inspire women throughout the Byzantine period. St. Thekla was an oft-cited case, an example of dedication to Christ overriding patriarchal family pressure to marry and produce children. Another was St. Macrina, who at the age of marriage, twelve years old, insisted on a celibate vocation.⁶ As an alternative to marriage, virginity was presented as a denial of the normal role of women. Others, such as Melania, sought to maintain their commitment to a chaste life after fulfilling the demands of marriage: once their children were grown, couples regularly agreed to separate in order to devote themselves to a celibate existence. Therasia and St. Paulinus of Nola or Anastasia and the silver merchant, Andronikos, observed marriages based on virginity from the beginning and merely institutionalized their avoidance of sexual relations when they adopted separate celibate lives.⁷

Women who dedicated themselves to a celibate existence before marriage or without getting married often lived together in special houses under the care of bishops. Their presence increased the aura of holiness of such houses, but their vulnerability and dependence

provoked problems associated with the *parthenoi syneisaktoi* or *subintroductae*, virgins who lived with celibate monks in spiritual relationships. Their existence is sparsely documented, for instance in the writings of St. John Chrysostom, who condemned the practice while devoting considerable resources to the support of virgins in Constantinople.⁸ By the late fourth century St. Basil noted the growth of this order of virgins, *tagma ton parthenon*, and as brides of Christ considered them superior to widows. He also stressed that no young girl who had not reached the age of reason, sixteen or seventeen, should be allowed to make this life-long dedication, and that any subsequent lapse into sexual relations should be punished with the same penalty as that for adulterous women. He further cautioned against mothers, fathers, brothers, or other relations who sought to push young women into the order before this age, stressing that they themselves had to express their own wish to embrace virginity.⁹

Whatever the qualities displayed by women, even the most devout were denied priestly functions. Only in some of the unorthodox sects did women emerge as leaders; they taught, prophesied, and spoke with tongues.¹⁰ Yet references to women as *ministrae* seem to indicate at least some sort of official position within the early Christian communities. Some appear to have served as the female equivalent of presbyters in the guise of *presbytides*, or as female presidents, *prokathemenai*.¹¹

From the fourth century onward, as the Christian churches took control of their community of believers, the male hierarchy carefully restricted the public roles of women. It established that only elderly women at least over the age of 40 (originally over 60) and of known Christian character could ever hold office. Canons decreed at the council of Laodicaea banned women from any priestly role, and therefore from the sanctuary of the church. This became the area of the *abaton*, where females are still not permitted. But some female officials were necessary to organize and induct other women converts, especially at their baptism. At the admission of adult women to the Christian community, decency required the presence of a female deacon who could guide the new believers through the ceremony of triple immersion. However, the gradual increase in the practice of infant baptism steadily reduced the need for deaconesses.

As well as this activity in the world, deaconesses held positions of responsibility in nunneries, for example, the deaconesses Platonias and Bryene, who ruled over fifty nuns in Nisibis.¹² They also on occasion were placed in charge of the young women who had dedicated their lives to Christ, as for example, was the case for Justina in Antioch.¹³ Sometimes a deaconess was also abbess. While monastic deaconesses might assist in running nunneries, their role as female leaders often

remained limited. As deaconesses they had very little public presence, although as individuals they evidently inspired others to adopt the monastic life, as, for instance, with Febronia's reading aloud in Nisibis, which made her the talk of the town.¹⁴ In later centuries the use of the title deaconess in the monastic context gradually eroded the public dimensions of the office and title.

The only other established order for women in the early Christian period was that of widows, a rank of righteous women who assisted the bishop and other clergy in their ecclesiastical duties. In contrast to deaconesses, they were not ordained and their precise roles are not closely defined. Nevertheless, they occupied a special place in the church and appear to have devoted themselves to social work, probably undertaking charitable and funerary tasks connected with the care of sick women, laying out and mourning the dead. Before the rise of charitable associations linked with *diakonai*, they may also have looked after the destitute, those suffering from leprosy and madness, or shipwrecked sailors and travelers who traditionally had a claim on ecclesiastical assistance. In the early Christian period widows were supported by the church in special homes, *cherotropheia*, often associated with the houses for girls and young women who dedicated themselves to Christ.¹⁵

The public activity of female officials, deaconesses, widows, and virgins, recognized and sustained by the official church, remained exceedingly limited and was not available to the great mass of women. For some, celibate communities provided an area of Christian devotion considered safer and more suitable. But even nunneries catered to only a very small number of Christian women, who found in them an established tradition that went back to the earliest days of organized ascetic practice. From at least the third century onward, perhaps earlier, celibate communities for women existed, often to accommodate female relatives of the founding fathers of Eastern monasticism. St. Antony placed his sister with such a community of pious women before he retired into the desert; Pachom's mother, who deplored his retreat, was similarly comforted by joining a group of women established close by. These early communities had produced great champions among the saints, martyrs, and patrons of the early church, especially Thekla and Melania.¹⁶

The nunnery constituted one obvious outlet for female religious expression that was in some sense public. It provided a disciplined routine of communal religious life run by a female leader, even if it could not function completely autonomously, since it required the outside intervention of a priest to bring in the eucharist. Under the direction of the abbess the nuns ran all other aspects of monastic organization, including education and estate management, and were

not necessarily dominated by the secular clergy. The composition and performance of liturgical chants by nuns and the copying of manuscripts is also documented, even if it was not as widespread as in male monasteries.

However, the most significant model for Byzantine women developed during the fifth century. This was the cult of the Virgin Mary, declared *Theotokos*, She who bore God, at the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesos in 431. This accumulation of the highest honor ever accorded to a Christian woman, which combined an elevated public image with the more usual private and personal role of mother, forged a unique model. While the fact of the virgin birth remained an unresolved paradox, the Gospel depiction of Mary as an indisputably good woman as well as a mother added a novel dimension to the early Christian inheritance. It created a specific role for the Christian family. The cult was deepened by the “miraculous” discovery of an icon of the Virgin and Child, allegedly painted by St. Luke in Jerusalem and found by Empress Eudokia, wife of Theodosios II, between 443 and 461.

In due course the theology established by the assembled bishops in 431 was integrated with relics associated with the Virgin, which further stimulated the new cult. Once identified as such, her veil and girdle were housed in special shrines, like the one constructed by Emperor Leo I and his wife Verina at Blachernai just outside the walls of Constantinople.¹⁷ Similarly, icons commemorating the holy family commanded new chapels and even new ecclesiastical foundations; the church of the Virgin at Jerusalem had a beautiful icon that was held to be responsible for the conversion of St. Mary the Egyptian.¹⁸

This zeal for the holy family of Christ in turn associated holiness with the everyday context of family circumstances, well known to the majority of women.¹⁹ It encouraged a saintly role for women within a purely domestic context. It strengthened a particular aspect of holiness, which male ecclesiastics enjoined on every Christian family. So, behind the outpouring of praise in honor of the *Theotokos*, it seems that the church promoted the cult in part because it inspired a model of maternal and familial Christian dedication. Even when they married and became mothers, women were assured that they could aspire to a truly Christian life.

Male Christian authors, however, generally considered their “sisters in the Lord” as essentially unreliable, prone to impulsive action and therefore not to be trusted with serious responsibilities. Although mothers were encouraged to attend to their children’s education, they were simultaneously enjoined always to love and support their husbands.²⁰ Their subordination to their male relations was uniformly presumed and was an essential characteristic of the holy Christian

family. This structural limitation on female self-expression provoked serious tensions if the husband refused to recognize his wife's dedication.

Within this context, the most women could aspire to, even when they were of irreproachable orthodoxy, was to command respect as very pious followers of Christ, or to protect and patronize the new faith with their private wealth.²¹ This becomes even more evident after the acknowledgement of the Christian God by Constantine I (sole emperor, 324–37), when the male hierarchy established Christianity as a state religion, which marginalized the official roles of female believers. As Susan Ashbrook Harvey has shown, female symbols and models of feminine power were gradually corrupted and adapted to conform to male ideas.²² Biblical misogyny and Roman patriarchy in combination with early Christian male distrust of women proved too powerful for women to assert any equivalence with their Christian brothers.

So however exemplary their devotions, Christian women were characterized as inferior to their male relatives. Yet there is considerable evidence that many families were converted by their womenfolk, and that imperial society was won for Christianity partly through the activity of female adherents.²³ Similarly, women privileged by personal riches continued to “lead” by virtue of their social prominence and relative independence. The example of Helena, Constantine I's mother, who “discovered” the True Cross during a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and founded the Church of the Holy Sepulchre over Christ's grave, was followed by other women. Helena's patronage also established another model for women, for she was later recognized as a saint and elevated to a status comparable to that of the earlier martyrs.

In this way an exclusively male Christian hierarchy celebrated two types of good woman, martyr and saint. These women's lives were commemorated and their behavior was recalled in annual liturgies and both public and private devotions. Christian women also inherited a tradition of service dedicated toward the relief of poverty and illness, creating forms of a more private religious expression that were open to all. Yet their religious experience remained lowly, conforming more to the pattern of serving and obedient women than to that of Mary Magdalene, the reformed prostitute, or Mary, the virgin mother. The all-male structure of authority that thus excluded women from leadership roles, also confined them to familiar, often domestic, activities.²⁴

The majority of women could avoid neither the biological nor the social role of motherhood. It is particularly important, therefore, in this survey of female life-structures to investigate the religious commitment of married women as well as that of the usually more closely scrutinized celibate virgins.

For most women the family setting of Christian devotion was a necessity. Unlike St. Febronia, who allegedly was dedicated to a nunnery at the age of two in early fourth-century Nisibis, very few Christian women were shielded from the world and conventional lifestyles.²⁵ Most were born into families that sought to provide them with a modicum of education and training in domestic tasks as a suitable preparation for marriage. Mothers regularly taught their children, a duty stressed by Polycarp as early as the second century, and practiced by women like Euphemia, who instructed her daughter Mary in “psalmody, the Scriptures and writing ... since her early youth.”²⁶

Mothers also initiated the girls to women’s work, usually defined as spinning and weaving, though in a rural context it could include agricultural tasks.²⁷ In some cases they also imparted a professional training, for instance, as an entertainer, innkeeper, or prostitute. The categories obviously overlapped in the upbringing of Theodora, wife of Emperor Justinian.²⁸ Similarly, Elpidia, grandmother of St. Theodore of Sykeon, instructed her daughter (his mother) in the running of an inn.²⁹ Despite the emphasis on education the ultimate aim of Byzantine parents was to marry off their daughters, without consulting them too closely, on the most favorable terms available. Female relatives, particularly grandmothers, often played a vital role in marriage arrangements.

At her marriage a Byzantine woman acquired her own property in the form of her dowry and gifts from her husband. Even if they were in fact controlled by him, legally they belonged to her and could not be alienated without her express permission. She also had the right to bequeath them as she wished. Normally, her children would benefit, for children were the chief aim of every marriage and failure to procreate was deplored and lamented.³⁰ Of course, husbands regularly abused female ownership, and the legal records are full of women defrauded of their own possessions.³¹ But the fact that women might officially control some property, however exiguous, granted them a certain security. For instance, if they were widowed, it enabled them to negotiate a second marriage of their own choice.

Within this traditional life-structure there were therefore two points at which a woman could try to impose the dictates of her own religious feelings, and both were occasioned by the prospect of marriage. Since girls were often betrothed very young (at any age over

seven) and could be married at twelve, it was unusual for them to resist parental and social pressures. St. Macrina, however, used the fact that she had been engaged from that age to a young man who subsequently died as a reason for not entering another marriage alliance. She considered the dead fiancé as someone away on a voyage and persisted in devoting herself to God.³² The threat of marriage and ensuring procreation frequently prompted women to assert their spiritual vocation. Since celibacy was still held to be superior to the exercise of sexuality, they continued to commit their virginity to Christ in a ceremony that established the spiritual equivalent of marriage. It was accompanied by all the actions and vocabulary of a secular wedding, including the ritual washing, anointing with oil, dressing, and wearing of both wedding rings and crowns, with even the notion of marriage feasts and celestial bedchambers. The *Lives* of the Persian martyr Martha and of St. Febronia provide telling examples of this vocabulary.³³

Denial of marriage constituted the most serious disruption of what was normally expected of women. By their choice of singleness rather than family, they insisted upon the legitimate alternative of religious commitment. Their relatives sometimes objected and tried to prevent it, especially when a young heiress proposed to distribute her wealth to the poor or donate it to the church. But since self-dedication to God was always recognized as a worthy Christian act, there were also social pressures in support of women taking this step, however unacceptable it seemed to the immediate family.³⁴

Once widowed or divorced for one of the causes that carried no ecclesiastical penalty, for example, proven infertility, women could—and often did—refuse to remarry. At this stage, particularly well-documented among women later commemorated as saints, the expression of a strong religious commitment could transform the regular pattern of female existence. The determination to retire from the world into a nunnery and pursue Christian devotion could be sustained even against serious objections. Those who successfully did so might also persuade their families to embrace the Christian life. St. Matrona, however, simply entrusted her young daughter Theodote to a friend, Susanna, and went off to practice *ascesis*.³⁵

The first of these disruptions (refusal to marry) is widely documented in hagiographic sources, which also record an identical process among devout young men. Even girls below the age at which they were expected to agree to be married are supposed to have declared themselves already betrothed to Christ and therefore not free to contract a regular marriage.³⁶ At their official entry to a nunnery they also became brides of Christ in ceremonies that symbolized spiritual marriage. The process of cutting their hair and putting on

black robes (the equivalent to monastic tonsure and habit) marked this new stage in their lives.

For those young women who were unable to avoid the arrangements made for their marriage, there was an outside chance but only a very slight possibility that their husbands had also been through a similar process. Melania the Younger hoped in vain that this would save her from the dynastic union forced upon her by her parents.³⁷ For young men also experienced the desire to commit themselves to Christ and to adopt ascetic practices that “tamed the demons of sexuality.”³⁸ When arranged marriages denied them this possibility, and then they found their marriage partners similarly inclined, it was, to judge from our sources, indeed a happy coincidence! Such a discovery was accompanied by great thanksgiving on the wedding night and an agreement to observe continued virginity. But the parents, who expected and desired grandchildren from the union, strenuously condemned this type of opposition.³⁹

Generally, however, Byzantine women had to follow the prescribed life-structure of marriage, childbearing, and (if they survived the process) old age, when they might adopt a celibate existence. As wives and mothers they could still perform the recommended Christian acts of charity and good works, as did Irene, mother of the author of the *Life* of Theophano; she devoted herself to good works with such vigor that she fell down as if dead and had to be cured by the saint’s ring dipped in holy water.⁴⁰ Couples often decided to live out their lives in separate monasteries, or to live as brother and sister in an entirely spiritual relationship, in the manner of the parents of St. Theodore of Stoudios.⁴¹

As mentioned, the second stage at which women had a chance to disrupt this established life-structure was at widowhood. On the death of her husband, a woman regained her dowry and often increased her wealth by inheritance. She might thus acquire sufficient means to remain independent, and although most would usually employ this to negotiate a second marriage, a woman could legitimately embrace celibacy, for remarriage especially if undertaken before the required year of mourning, carried a general stigma of disrespect for her first husband.⁴² Third marriages entailed more severe ecclesiastical penance, and fourth marriages were eventually prohibited altogether.⁴³ Ecclesiastical approval of widowhood created an additional pressure for widows to revert to singleness, whether in a monastic context or in the world.

In Byzantine society at large men expressed a variety of views on widows. Some held that nunneries existed as havens to enable women to avoid having to remarry. Thus, in the tenth to twelfth centuries, St. Neilos of Rossano urged the men of his village to restore and maintain

its nunnery so that their widows would find shelter there and would not dishonor them by being forced to remarry. Others, however, urged women to remarry on the grounds that widowhood was insupportable, and some recommended against ever marrying a widow.⁴⁴ Despite the differing views, however, men nonetheless paid court to women with extensive means, sizable dowries, and significant inheritance in land or property, and remarriage appears to have been a very common event.

Young widows of high social rank regularly found themselves the object of renewed marriage proposals, occasionally backed by imperial decrees, for instance, St. Athanasia of Aegina, who was ordered to remarry by an imperial decree, enforced by her parents. She was, however, able to counteract the decree by converting her second husband to the pursuit of Christian excellence, and eventually he retired into a monastery, leaving her free to do the same.⁴⁵ To those who were most at risk, entering a nunnery was perhaps the safest way to avoid such pressures. Like older women, they were thus assured of retirement to a *gerokomeion*, old people's home, attached to a monastery. But elderly widows often expected their children to support them, and went to live with their married children; those who were childless sometimes sought to adopt suitable sons and daughters to look after them in their old age, while others remained as heads of households.⁴⁶

Together with the possibility of a religious commitment, therefore, other forms of secular activity were more easily realized by widows. Thus, many women exercised choice only after the deaths of their husbands, for becoming a widow presented the most radical potential for independence. In their reestablished singleness, they could pursue independent Christian devotions without restraint, attending to the needs of the poor and sick in charitable activities, founding and running nunneries, or simply spending their days in prayer, like Theodora, the elderly servant of Constantine the barbarian, whose visions of Paradise were interpreted as a sign of her great faith.⁴⁷

Recently, Jack Goody has claimed that the church's motive in sustaining widows was thoroughly selfish, in that it hoped to benefit from increased endowments.⁴⁸ The evidence from Byzantium suggests that this was indeed the result, but the women who bequeathed their land, buildings, material possessions, and revenues to the church might well have done so in any case. Remission of sins and concern for the soul weighed heavily in their decision. An example may be found in the case of Zoe, long widowed, who decided in 1152 to become a nun. She donated an area of vineyard, olives, mulberries, and other fruit trees, which formed part of her dowry, as well as other fields, a church with its buildings, and her freed slaves, to the church

of St. John Theristes, in which she requested to be buried. The gifts were made on the understanding that prayers would be said for herself, her husband, and King Roger II of Sicily, and that alms would be distributed to the poor from the vineyards and fields donated. Since there was only a monastery for men attached to the church of St. John, Zoe's commitment to the monastic life was probably pursued at her home until her death, when she knew that she would be buried in the church.⁴⁹

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE EXPRESSIONS OF RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT

In light of the previous sections, this concluding section will aim to evaluate the decline of recognized, public roles for women and the concomitant growth of more personal, private forms of Christian devotion. Several canons issued by the Council in Trullo (692) document measures to curtail these public roles, or to correct aspects of them considered unsuitable, while others were intended to restrict the public activities of women.⁵⁰ By that date there were only two official ecclesiastical positions open to women, those of deaconess and widow, which were limited to suitably Christian females over the age of forty.⁵¹ In many cases sisters and daughters of male leaders were chosen to fill these roles, like the deaconess Elizabeth, sister of the bishop Paul, who was martyred after him at Najran.⁵² But it's unclear whether the orders of widows and deaconesses continued to attract dedicated women.

Deaconesses held positions of responsibility within nunneries in addition to their public roles in the baptism of adult women. The use of the title in a monastic context tended gradually to debase the public functions of the deaconess. By the ninth century, for instance, it seems to have become a merely formal attribute, as in the case of St. Irene of Chrysobalanton, who was ordained deaconess of the Great Church by the Patriarch of Constantinople immediately before her election as abbess. Subsequently, she never left her monastery to fulfill the public role of deaconess.⁵³ This development may perhaps reflect a more general use of the title as one of respect for particularly saintly figures, or for women such as the ex-wives of bishops, who might be granted the title in compensation for the loss of their husbands. The office was clearly subjected to pressures that rendered it more honorary, and reduced its potential for recognized female leadership. While monastic deaconesses might assist in running nunneries, their public presence might be very limited. It was as a very saintly and ascetic woman that St. Irene inspired others to adopt a more Christian life, not because she was a deaconess.⁵⁴

Similarly, the continued activity of an order of widows is not well-documented into the medieval period, and its functions may well have been taken over by charitable associations, such as the *diakoniai*.⁵⁵ An eleventh-century group, devoted to an icon of the Virgin based in the Naupaktitissa nunnery in Thebes, certainly included women, who participated publicly in the cult of the icon.⁵⁶ But there is no evidence that they also did any official work associated with widows. While it is possible that some of the duties of women in nunneries might be performed by widows, for example, that of *thyroros*, the woman who guarded the door,⁵⁷ again there is no suggestion that these relate to an order of widows. So for neither deaconesses nor widows, as an order, is there any specific evidence; both are better documented by individuals acting in a personal capacity (for instance, Theodora, mentioned earlier).

In the same way, what had been a specific and separate order of virgins seems to have suffered a demise in the medieval period, no doubt due to an increasing social pressure to marry and the particular development of Byzantine nunneries. Those who succeeded in adopting virginity in the Byzantine Empire normally did so under the aegis of a community of nuns or a particularly devout relative, although stray references to *parthenonas* being destroyed by the iconoclasts in eighth-century Constantinople may indicate that institutions for virgins were maintained.⁵⁸ Thus, the public activity of deaconesses, widows, and virgins, which had been recognized and sustained by the early Christian church, does not appear to have flourished in the Byzantine period. And one can only conclude that the orders gradually became redundant and were considered unnecessary both by the church hierarchy and by those women who might have sought a more public role through them.

Although now removed from the world, however, nunneries nevertheless created a possibility for female leadership that developed the inherent powers of holy women like St. Irene of Chrysobalanton.⁵⁹ Although she did on one occasion manage to use her influence at the imperial court to clear the name of a kinsman who had been unjustly accused, in the main her overt power was not explicitly in the public domain. Her leadership derived more from examples of her private dedication to ascetic practices than through any manifest public role or activity. As a well-known figure in Constantinople, however, she inevitably fulfilled a recognized role, which set up a model for other women.

Other abbesses performed the same function. Occasionally, the public esteem in which they could be held could even reverse male presumptions about female inferiority. An otherwise unknown abbess from southern Italy, who exercised the role of spiritual adviser to

young St. Neilos of Rossano, was honored by him, despite his vociferous hatred of the female sex.⁶⁰ Other women headed foundations for both men and women, like Anthousa, who founded a double monastery and presided over it during the iconoclast persecution.⁶¹ Women who were directly related to holy men often achieved a comparable distinction; Kale, the sister of St. Luke of Steiris, displayed Christian qualities that were as renowned as his.⁶² Even if they were not associated with religious communities, such women revealed the capacity to inspire that was greatly appreciated by both men and women.

While nunneries established an important outlet for the piety of Byzantine women, such communities were not always peaceful havens from the world. From an early date, they were subjected, like monasteries, to a secondary and sometimes abusive use as prisons. This custom appears to have been introduced by emperors who regularly disposed of their rivals by forcing them to enter a monastery. At the end of the seventh century Tiberios ordered that Leontios, his predecessor, should be mutilated and confined in the prison of the Dalmatou community.⁶³ A similar practice was used to remove ex-empresses and imperial mothers who were thought to scheme to extend their influence. In 969 the ex-empress Theophano was banished first to a monastery on the island of Prote or Prokonnesos, and later to one in the Armeniakon *thema*, while her mother was sent to another in the Boukellarion.⁶⁴

Constantine VI, however, divorced his first wife and banished her to a nunnery solely in order that he might remarry.⁶⁵ At a less exalted level of society, women convicted of prostitution, adultery, or such unnatural crimes as incest were condemned to nunneries, though they were not necessarily tonsured. The institutions then took on an ambiguous character and their leaders became in effect jailers.⁶⁶ In the late tenth century Emperor Leo VI extended this role to cover women suffering from madness; his law states that the local bishop must find places where the abbess will guarantee to take good care of them.⁶⁷ But female communities were inevitably disrupted when the insane were thrust into their midst.

The rationale for committing prostitutes and adulteresses to nunneries apparently stemmed from the hope that by good example they would gradually adopt better, that is, more pious, ways. But when this failed, those who had entered the nunnery involuntarily would not be likely to remain quietly inside. Prostitutes confined to the Metanoia nunnery near Constantinople in Theodora's efforts to reform them showed every intention of escaping if possible.⁶⁸ Quite possibly Emperor Michael IV's eleventh-century initiative met with a similar fate, although Psellos assumed that all those fallen women

remained “a youthful band enrolled in the service of God, as soldiers of virtue.”⁶⁹ Whether ex-prostitutes were generally kept physically separated from committed virgins is unclear, but it seems safe to presume that women imprisoned against their will would not always share the spiritual dedication of nuns. In this respect, particular nunneries were identified publicly with prisons and at least some of the nuns served as prison officers, in novel and recognized roles.

Another aspect of the nunnery that generated problems of a nonspiritual nature stemmed from the different ranks of nuns. While the principle of not denying entry to anyone who displayed genuine commitment to the religious life was clearly established, social distinctions persisted within monasteries.⁷⁰ Those who brought considerable wealth, property, and servants to the community were received with greater honor than widows of modest means. Byzantine nunneries were often run by aristocratic women, whose upbringing and education accustomed them to the services of others.⁷¹ Similarly, women who came from very poor backgrounds may have been used to working in a humbler capacity, however great their piety. So certain gradations divided both the group of committed nuns and those women who had been cloistered for non-religious reasons.

Apart from those imprisoned for serious crimes, women whose only sin was to have married a future bishop were also relegated to nunneries. The problem arose because in the East, unlike the medieval West, clerics ordained to the lower ecclesiastical orders were specifically instructed to respect their marriage vows. So they continued to live with their wives. But bishops were expected to be celibate. Priests who were nominated to bishoprics, therefore, were ordered to try and persuade their wives to enter nunneries in far-distant regions.⁷² This meant that the women had to agree to dissolve their marriages in order to free their husbands for the highest office of bishop. In a similar fashion, when Isaac I Komnenos decided to give up his imperial rule, his wife Aikaterine had to divorce him so that he could retire to a monastery. She and her daughter were also obliged to follow suit.⁷³ While the council took care not to presume their agreement, it clearly considered the nunnery a suitable place for these ex-wives in what became in effect confinement. It also stipulated that if they proved worthy they might attain the rank of deaconess, perhaps as a reward for good behavior (see earlier).

With these multiple functions, nunneries might come to house women who had none of the strong personal dedication associated with the heroic female leaders of such institutions—not only those convicted of adultery or incest, but girls who persisted in unsuitable liaisons, younger daughters for whom dowries could not be afforded, widows who had no close relatives to look after them in their old age,

those who were physically handicapped, like St. Martha of Monemvasia, or the mentally disturbed.⁷⁴ Given these varied terms of entry, not all nunneries can have functioned in the ideal manner described in the acts of St. Thekla and other early records of female monasticism. Jealousies were generated that did nothing to improve spiritual conditions inside the nunnery.

The combination of this ambivalence with the insecurity associated with underfunded family foundations meant that many nunneries had only a transitory existence. They did not succeed in establishing a permanent presence in the manner of well-patronized male communities, and some may have been quite like private institutions, family-based and personally run. There is a notable absence of records from celebrated female communities, even the better-endowed Late Byzantine imperial nunneries, which form the equivalent to the houses of Mount Athos.⁷⁵

Perhaps it was partly in reaction to this history that women with exceptionally strong religious feelings persistently sought out the wilder, desert areas of the empire.⁷⁶ They desired a more rewarding spiritual experience in emulation of the original Desert Fathers. The fact that the literary tradition of holy women living alone in the wilderness was re-created in medieval instances leaves no doubt that *ascesis* was practiced by individual women and gives the lie to recent attempts to dismiss the tradition as mere storytelling.⁷⁷ Although the *stylitissa* of the *Life* of St. Lazaros remains exceptional, there are other examples of feminine determination to pursue a solitary holy life.⁷⁸

Many had to adopt an element of disguise, for it was extremely hard for a woman to survive alone in the eleventh century.⁷⁹ But that some attempted the eremitical life cannot be doubted, even if they were not numerous. Their existence points to an ever-present possibility in Byzantine society, a potential that could occasionally be realized. It gainsays the fairy-tale interpretation of earlier stories, which continued to circulate widely. Although this manifestation of eremitical Christian devotion clearly involved an entirely private act of renunciation, it also created a public model of religious commitment. Such holy women inevitably set up examples for emulation, however much they denied any desire for this role and tried to avoid it. Their commitment was recorded in hagiographic and narrative sources, and thus existed for other women, who might try to follow the same route.⁸⁰

For the great mass of women, however, such a violent negation of the more usual life-structure was impossible. Their religious commitment had to be expressed within the bounds of family life. As married women and mothers, they nonetheless aspired to a truly Christian life. And notions of sanctity gradually adapted to this reality,

moving from the context of virginity associated with early Christian martyrdom to that of the Byzantine family.⁸¹ By the tenth century the case of St. Mary the Younger provides a telling example of this new model of private commitment. Mary led a secluded family life; her public acts were restricted to generosity to the poor and other pious good works. Yet in this relatively modest contribution to holiness her biographer recognized the traits of an ideal piety. Her *Life* formed a tribute to this novel concept of sanctity.⁸²

In this process Byzantine women expressed their familiarity with the Gospel stories that displayed an appreciation of individuals like Mary and Martha, or of Phoebe and others recommended by St. Paul. These New Testament texts were regularly read in church and were learned by heart by many who could not read but who were inspired by them to greater devotion. Within their restricted family sphere, female commitment increasingly took on more private and personal forms, often focused on the veneration of particular icons or the elaboration of individual practices.⁸³

In a telling example, the icon of the Virgin at her shrine at Blachernai was visited by a mother, desperate to conceive a son. As she addressed her prayers to the Virgin, she believed that the image responded, promising that she would bear a son. After his birth, she gratefully dedicated the child, the future St. Stephen the Younger, to the Virgin at the same icon.⁸⁴ Such talking statues and imaginary conversations were not new, as the *Life* of St. Mary the Egyptian and the devotion of Empress Zoe to the icon called “Antiphonetes” demonstrate. It was given this name precisely because she believed it heard and responded to her. If women in such different social circumstances and eras found comfort in this type of private conversation, it suggests that their public participation as observers in the liturgy was not entirely satisfying. The cult of the Virgin Mary perhaps offered a new avenue for their religious commitment.

Worship of the Virgin was not, of course, limited to lay women. In the ninth century a different form of homage to the Virgin was manifested by the nun Thekla, who composed a long hymn “written by a woman, in honour of a woman, for and about women.”⁸⁵ This specifically feminine voice was directed toward the *Theotokos*, She who made the Incarnation possible, and to St. Thekla, the first martyr, Anna, the mother of Mary, and even Eve, the first woman. In 198 verses, Thekla the nun devotes her skills as a hymnographer exclusively to the female sex in a highly controlled and educated manner. Her achievement proves that it was not only men who wrote liturgies devoted to the *Theotokos*. On Her feast days, nuns in certain nunneries might be heard singing Her praises in hymns composed by a woman.⁸⁶

Among women in general, one of the most striking instances of female expressions of religiosity involves the use of icons as intercessors, as in the tale related earlier of the woman interceding with the Virgin at Blachernai for the blessing of a child.⁸⁷ This is particularly well-documented for women cursed by infertility, who failed to produce children, especially sons. They often addressed their prayers to the Virgin, primary intercessor and chief role model for potential mothers. In one instance we hear of an elderly couple turning instead to St. Glykeria with a plea for a child, whom they promised to dedicate to her should the intercession be successful. The child who duly arrived, a daughter, Elizabeth, was dedicated to the saint and was trained by her aunt, who was abbess of a nunnery.⁸⁸ Of course, such stories reflect ancient accounts of the miraculous birth to elderly parents of children marked out for particularly holy lives. But the additional evidence of female intercessors whose painted representations facilitated the miracles draws attention to the peculiarly private nature of icon veneration.

The domestic use of icons both in poor households and in the private chapels of the wealthy highlights a widespread practice of this style of personal veneration.⁸⁹ Even in public spaces where icons were displayed, such as churches and shrines attached to cult centers, people made their devotions alone, without the intervention of priest, liturgy, or ecclesiastical ritual. In the case of women, such independent access to the holy, replete with the promise of relief from anxiety and resolution of problems, represented an extraordinary source of hope. The nature of icon veneration appears to encourage a direct and individual relationship between the venerator and the holy person venerated. For women in particular this quality seems to have been deeply appreciated, as imaginary conversations held with the saint represented confirm.

Through icons mothers also instructed their children in the history of the holy family and other saints. Even the young could learn which saint was represented in a painting and could recognize the same figure in a different context, for instance, dreams. Children as well as adults identified figures as Christian saints coming to help them, rather than demonic temptations. Under iconoclast persecution, when possession of a single icon was prohibited, women of no great means sustained the cult and shared their precious images with other iconophiles.⁹⁰ In a period when medical science was fairly rudimentary and doctors often charged high fees, certain icons also offered women the hope of a cure. Miraculous powers were associated with the icons themselves (some exuded fluids that healed), or with oil from the lamps that burned in front of them. Many a cure was effected by the application of such blessed oil, not only for physical

injuries but also for mental distress and apparent death. In addition to the problem of infertility women with children regularly made their devotions in shrines where they implored the familiar holy images to cure cases considered medically hopeless. The combination of an already-established form of personal communication through the icon, with the high expectation of that saint's miraculous intervention, often proved successful. But it depended in large part on the private pattern of worship engendered by a familiar and much-loved image.

Icon veneration appealed to a wide variety of people, male and female. It was particularly suitable for poor women who might never be able to own an icon, but who could spend hours in front of images in shrines and churches. For those with means, personal icons erected in their private chapels, or simply in their most private quarters, usually bedrooms, constituted a more secluded form of similar worship. Although the church endorsed and supported icon veneration from the mid-ninth century onward, it later came to appreciate the dangers posed by such an exclusively personal pattern of devotion. Ownership of icons might keep women from attending church; devotion to a particular icon in a church might become a pretext for unwarranted trips outside the home. However, the personal satisfaction gained from private contemplation and conversation with the saints through their icons continued right through the Byzantine period.

Whether it still remains as appealing to women in particular is hard to tell. But in Greece, lands of the late Soviet Union, and other countries where Orthodox practice is observed, the association of women and icons appears deeply embedded.⁹¹ Icon veneration continues to provide an outlet for private devotion that is not met by regular ecclesiastical services.⁹² In this respect it preserves unchanged a tradition that can be traced back to the early church's fear and mistrust of women, which marginalized them and drove them to seek alternative outlets for their religious feelings. By allowing them no adequately satisfying public role, Christianity encouraged women to seek a more private one. And through the lifelike representations of holy people, made in melted wax applied to wood, they found a means of expressing their intense commitment to the faith.⁹³

NOTES

1. See "‘Femina Byzantina’: The Council in Trullo on Women," [chapter 5](#) in this volume.

2. See Averil Cameron, "Virginity as Metaphor: Women and the Rhetoric of Early Christianity," in Averil Cameron, *History as Text* (London, 1989), 184–205.

3. On the problem, see Cameron, as earlier, esp. 184–92.

4. Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Life of Melania the Younger* (New York/Toronto, 1984), 13–15, and 11–14 on Serena; in general, see K. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/New York, 1982). **Update** But see now Clark's deconstruction of such texts, "Ideology, History and Gender. The Construction of 'Woman' in Late Ancient Christianity," *JECS* 2 (1994), 155–84; "The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the Linguistic Turn," *Church History* 61, no. 1 (1998), 1–31; "Holy Women, Holy Words: Early Christian Women, Social History and the 'Linguistic Turn,'" *JECS* 6 (1998), 413–30.

5. See S. P. Brock and S. Ashbrook Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1987), especially the case of Febronia, the women martyrs of Najran and the Persian martyrs. **Update** Joel Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh: Narrative and Christian Heroism in Late Antique Iraq* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 2006), on later Persian martyrs.

6. P. Maravel, ed., *Vie de Ste Macrine* (Paris, 1983), 5. **Update** Eng. trans. by Joan M. Petersen, *Handmaids of the Lord: Contemporary Descriptions of Feminine Asceticism in the First Six Centuries* (Kalamazoo, 1996); cf. Clark on the problems of this text, "The Lady Vanishes," as earlier, 1–31.

7. **Update** Dennis E. Trout, *Paulinus of Nola: Life, Letters and Poems* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1999); Anne P. Alwis, *Celibate Marriages in Late Antique and Byzantine Hagiography* (London, 2011), with an edition and translation of the Life of Anastasia and Andronikos, 249–77.

8. See his two tracts against those who maintain the custom, St. John Chrysostom, PG, 47, 495–532.

9. St. Basil, c. 18, Ralles-Potles, *Syntagma* 4 (1854), 140–42; also with the Fr. trans. in Joannou, *Discipline générale* 2 (1962), 118–21; and Eng. trans. in Percival, *Councils* (1900), 605. **Update** On widows, see Thomas McGinn, *Widows and Patriarchy Ancient and Modern* (London, 2008), esp. 36–47; J. Bremmer, "Pauper or Patroness: The Widow in the Early Christian Church," in *Between Poverty and the Pyre: Moments in the History of Widowhood*, ed. J. Bremmer and L. P. van den Bosch (London, 1995).

10. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.14, 16; 18.13 on the Montanist prophetess, Maximilla, "who pretended to prophesy" (for Eng. trans., see Williamson (1989), 158–63; 166–67. See also E. Pagels, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent* (London, 1990), 60–77 on the Gnostics.

11. *Canons of Laodicea*, 11, 44; Ralles-Potles, 3 (1853) 181, 212; Joannou, 1, 2 (1962) 135, 148. For a useful discussion of the terms used, see A. J. Maclean, *The Ministry of Women* (London, 1919), 53–63. **Update** *Portraits of Spiritual Authority* ed. J. W. Drijvers and J. W. Watt (Leiden, 1999), esp. Christine Trevett, "Spiritual Authority and the 'Heretical Woman,'" 45–78.

12. See Brock-Harvey, as earlier, 154.

13. See P. Wilson-Kastner, *The Lost Tradition: Women Writers of the Early Church* (Washington, DC, 1981), 142–43.

14. See Brock-Harvey, as earlier, 155.

15. Sozomenos, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.15.5. See H. J. Schroeder, *Disciplinary Canons of the General Councils* (London, 1937), 54 and n. 124. **Update** There is an increasing bibliography devoted to widows in the early church; see, for instance, Thomas McGinn, *Widows and Patriarchy Ancient and Modern* (London, 2008), esp. 36–47; J. Bremmer, "Pauper or Patroness: The Widow in the Early Christian Church," in *Between Poverty and the Pyre*, ed. Bremmer and van den Bosch, 31–57. Charlotte Methuen, "Widows, Bishops and the Struggle for Authority in the Didache Apostolorum," *JEH* 46 (1995), 197–213.

16. See E. A. Clark, "Authority and Humility: A Conflict of Values in Fourth-Century Female Monasticism," *BF* 9 (1985), 17–33; R. R. Ruether and E. Mc-

Laughlin, eds., *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York, 1979), 71–98. **Update** Kate Cooper, “The Household and the Desert: Monastic and Biological Communities in the *Lives* of Melania the Younger,” in *Household, Women, and Christianities in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Turnhout, 2005), 11–35; Marilyn Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism from the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2000), 45–46.

17. See C. Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1972), 34–35. **Update** Maria Vassilaki, ed., *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium* (Aldershot, UK, 2005).

18. *Life of St. Mary the Egyptian* 23, PG, 87, pt. 3, 3713B–3713D.

19. See Mango, as earlier, 40. **Update** Among the many books devoted to women’s Christian devotion, see Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA, 1996; eadem, *The Fall of the Roman Household* (Cambridge, UK, 2007), esp. 44–53, on the “senatorial *domina* as *Miles Christi*.”

20. See Wilson-Kastner, as earlier, xi. See also Polycarp, *Letter to the Philippians* 4; J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers I–III* (London, 1889), II, pt. 3, 329. **Update** Ross Kraemer, *Unreliable Witnesses: Religion, Gender and History in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean* (Oxford, 2011), with helpful definitions of terms such as patriarchy.

21. There is considerable dispute over the precise nature of women’s power in the early Christian period; see, for example, the claims made by J. McNamara, *A New Song: Celibate Women in the First Three Christian Centuries* (New York, 1983); E. Schlüsser Fiorenza, “Word, Spirit and Power: Women in Early Christian Communities,” in Ruether and McLaughlin, as earlier, 29–70. On leadership through personal wealth, see E. A. Clark, “Authority and Humility,” as earlier.

22. “Women in Early Syrian Christianity,” in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, ed. Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt (London, 1983), 288–98, esp. 290–93.

23. See D. J. Kyrtatas, *The Social Structure of the Early Christian Communities* (London, 1987), 131–35; R. MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire, AD 100–400* (New Haven, CT, 1984), 39–41. **Update** Michele Renée Salzman, *Aristocratic Women: Conductors of Christianity in the Fourth Century* (Lubbock, TX, 1989); Kate Cooper, “Insinuations of Womanly Influence: An Aspect of the Christianization of the Roman Aristocracy,” *JRS* 82 (1992), 150–64.

24. B. Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge, UK, 1988), 184–210.

25. Brock-Harvey, as earlier, 156.

26. *Ibid.*, 126, cf. the mother of St. Stephen, who ensured his Christian education to the age of six, PG, 100. 1081A–1081B. The number of educated women among early Christians, such as St. Thekla, indicates not only recruitment to Christianity from the upper classes but also a more widespread determination to acquire Christian learning. **Update** See the new edition of the *Life of St. Stephen*, *La Vie d’Etienne le Jeune par Etienne le Diacre*, ed and trans. Marie-France Auzépy, *Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs*, vol. 3 (Aldershot, UK, 1997).

27. A. P. Kazhdan and G. Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium* (Washington, DC, 1982), 72; cf. Angeliki Laiou “The Festival of Agathe: Comments on the Life of Constantinopolitan Women,” in *Byzantium: Aghieroma ston A. N. Strato*, 2 vols. (Athens, 1986), I, 111–22. **Update** J. Herrin, “Unrivalled Influence: Mothers and Daughters in the Medieval Greek World,” [chapter 4](#) in this volume.

28. Most famously described by Procopius in the *Secret History* ix, esp. 9–26, ed. and trans. H. B. Dewing (London, 1935), vol. 6, 104–11.

29. *Vie de Théodore de Sykéon* 3–4, ed. A.-J. Festugière, 2 vols. (Brussels, 1970) I, 3–4. Eng trans. Elizabeth Dawes and Norman N. Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints*:

Contemporary Biographies (Oxford, 1948).

30. E. Trapp, *Digenes Akritas: Synoptische Ausgabe der ältesten Version* (Vienna, 1971), G 7, lines 180–88; 342 on childlessness.

31. A. E. Laiou, “The Role of Women in Byzantine Society,” *JÖB* 31, no. 1 (1981), 233–60; see also Herrin, “In Search of Byzantine Women: Three Avenues of Approach,” [chapter 2](#) in this volume.

32. *Vie de Ste Macrine*, 4–5 (Maraval, as earlier, 152–57).

33. Brock-Harvey, as earlier, 70–71; 165. **Update** Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 1994); Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988).

34. St. Basil, c. 41, citing St. Paul, I Corinthians 7.39, Ralles-Potles, vol. 4, 188; Joannou, *Discipline générale* 2, 134–35; Percival, *Councils*, 607.

35. *Life of St. Matrona* 3; AASS NOV 3 (1910), 792. **Update** Alice-Mary Talbot, ed., *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints’ Lives in English Translation* (Washington, DC, 1996), 13–64.

36. See, for example, the case of Justa, who followed the example of Thekla and declared that “Christ alone was her successful Suitor and Lord”; see Wilson-Kastner, as earlier, 149.

37. See Clark, *Life of Melania*, as earlier, 1–8 (note 4) and Cooper (note 16).

38. See Brown, *The Body and Society*, as earlier.

39. For example, see the two versions of the *Life* of Theophanes Confessor, ed. C. De Boor (Stuttgart, 1883, and often repr.) vol. 2, 5–6, 15–16, where his father complains. **Update** See also Alwis, *Celibate Marriages*, as earlier.

40. See E. Kurtz, “Zwei griechische Texte über die Hl. Theophano ...,” *Mémoires de l’Académie impériale de St. Petersburg, hist-philol.classe*, 8e série, 3/2 (St. Petersburg, 1898), 26, 18–19.

41. See Herrin, “In Search of Byzantine Women: Three Avenues of Approach,” [chapter 2](#) in this volume; A.-M. Talbot, “Late Byzantine Nuns: By Choice or Necessity?,” *BF* 9 (1985), 103–17, esp. 107–8.

42. See *Peira* 4 for judgments imposing penance on women for marrying again within the period of mourning, 24.10, 13; 25.47.

43. See J. Beaucamp, “La situation juridique de la femme à Byzance,” *CahCM* 20 (1977), 145–76, esp. 159–61. **Update** A. Laiou, “Imperial Marriages and Their Critics in the Eleventh Century: The Case of Skylitzes,” *DOP* 46 (1992); and Ioli Kalavresou, “Irregular Marriages in the Eleventh Century and the Zoe and Constantine Mosaic in Hagia Sophia,” in Angeliki E. Laiou and Dieter Simon, eds., *Law and Society in Byzantium, Ninth–Twelfth Centuries* (Washington, DC, 1994), 241–60.

44. PG, 120.85C–D; Trapp, as earlier, G 8.135–41, 362, on remarriage better than widowhood. Cf. A. P. Kazhdan, “Widows Lost and Regained,” *B* 43 (1973), 509. **Update** See the bibliography on widows cited earlier, note 15.

45. See L. Carras, ed., “Life of St. Athanasia,” in *Maistor*, ed. A. Moffatt (Canberra, 1984), 199–211, esp. 212–24. **Update** Eng. trans. in Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium*, as earlier, 137–58.

46. See Trapp, as earlier, Z 8.5011–17, 399, on elderly mothers living with married children. For the case of an adopted son, see A. Guillou, ed., *La Theotokos de Hagia Agathe (Oppido) 1050–64/5. Corpus des actes grecs d’Italie du sud et de Sicile* (Vatican, Rome, 1972), 30.12–18; and on female heads of households, A. E. Laiou-Thomadakis, *Peasant Society in the Late Byzantine Empire* (Princeton, 1977), 89–94. **Update** Leonora Neville, “Taxing Sophronia’s Son-in-law: Representations of Women in Provincial Documents,” in *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience, 800–1200*, ed. Lynda Garland (Aldershot, UK, 2006), 77–89.

47. See S. G. Vilinsky, ed., “Zhitie sv. Vasiliya Novogo v russkoi literature,”

Zapiski Novorossiiskogo universiteta, Ist.-filol. fak. 6–7 (1911–13), 20. **Update** Jane Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium* (Cambridge, UK, 2007), 125–26.

48. See J. Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge, UK, 1983).

49. A. Guillou, *Saint-Jean-Théristsès (1054–1264) Corpus des actes grecs d'Italie du sud et de Sicile: Recherches d'histoire et de géographie*, vol. 5 (Rome, 1980), no. 21, esp. 131–32.

50. See Judith Herrin, “‘Femina Byzantina’: The Council in Trullo on Women,” **chapter 5** in this volume.

51. For the Council of Chalcedon, c. 15; see Ralles-Potles, vol. 2 (1852), 254; Joannou, as earlier, vol. I, 1, 81–82; Percival, as earlier, 279; cf. Schroeder, as earlier, 107–11. For St. Basil, c. 24, stipulating the age of sixty for widows; see Ralles-Potles, vol. 4 (1854), 154–55; Joannou, as earlier, vol. II, 126; Percival, as earlier, 606. **Update** See the new Eng. trans. by Richard Price and Michael Gaddis, *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, 3 vols. (Liverpool, 2005).

For the Council in Trullo, c. 40, see Ralles-Potles, vol. 2 (1852), 422–23; Joannou, as earlier, I, 1, 175–77; Percival, as earlier, 384. **Update** See the Eng. trans. by G. Nedungatt and M. Featherstone, *Kanonika* 6 (1995).

On the development of the deaconess, see Sister Teresa (Joan White), “The Development and Eclipse of the Deacon Abbess,” *Studia Patristica* 19 (1989), 111–16; A. G. Martimort, *Deaconesses: An Historical Study* (San Francisco, 1986). **Update** See the bibliography on widows cited earlier, and on deaconesses, Eva Maria Synek, ed., *KANON XVI* (2000), a special volume on *Mother, Nun, Deaconess, Images of Women According to Eastern Canon Law*; eadem, “Der Frauendiakonat der Alten Kirche und seine Rezeption durch die orthodoxen Kirchen,” *Ostkirchliche Studien* 48 (1999) 3–31, showing how the example of early Christian traditions of female deacons could assist modern church reforms. R. F. Taft, “Women at Church in Byzantium: Where, When and Why?” *DOP* 52 (1998), 27–87, esp. 63–70; Valerie A. Karras, “Female Deacons in the Byzantine Church,” *Church History* 73.2 (2004), 279–316.

52. See Brock-Harvey, as earlier, 105–7.

53. See Rosenqvist, as earlier, 7, 21 (28.3, with n. 8).

54. *Ibid.*, 10, 35: “gynaikon de kai parthenon ton periphaneia genous semnynomenon” (44.9); cf. ch. 23, 89 (108.26).

55. See P. Magdalino, “Church, Bath and Diakonia in Medieval Constantinople,” in *Church and People in Byzantium*, ed. R. Morris (Birmingham, 1991), 165–88.

56. See J. Nesbitt and J. Wiita, “A Confraternity of the Comnenian Era,” *BZ* 68 (1975), 360–84, esp. 367; 372 (signatures of the wife of Theodoros Kamateros, a representative of a famous local family, and four other women).

57. See Rosenqvist (1986), 13, 42; 15, 54; 21, 76 (54; 68; 94); in every case the feminine participle confirms that this is a female doorkeeper.

58. Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, vol. 1, 443. **Update** See the new Eng. trans. with helpful annotation by Cyril Mango and Roger Scott (Oxford, 1997), 611.

59. See Rosenqvist, as earlier. **Update** Irene is one of the female leaders who exercised quite a public role from her more secluded monastery, thus demonstrating Jinty Nelson’s observation that both court and convent could be public spaces, and gender “often confounds the very distinction between public and private”; see her review of Paul Veyne’s *History of Private Life*, vol. 1, in *Social History* 15 (1990).

60. D. de F. Abrahamse, “Byzantine Asceticism and Women’s Monasteries in Early Medieval Italy,” in *Medieval Religious Women I: Distant Echoes*, ed. J. Nicols and L. T. Shank (Kalamazoo, 1984), 31–49, esp. 40. Many earlier examples could be cited; see Shirin, spiritual mother to many monks; Brock-Harvey, as earlier, 179–81; or Susan guiding a monk tormented by demons, *ibid.*, 129–41.

61. C. Mango, “St. Anthousa of Mantineon and the family of Constantine V,” *AB*

100 (1982), 401–9.

62. AASS OCT 6, 15.341D. **Update** Carolyn L. and W. Robert Connor, *The Life and Miracles of Saint Luke of Steiris* (Brookline, MA, 1994).

63. Theophanes Confessor, as earlier, vol. 1, 371; Eng. trans., Mango and Scott, 517.

64. Leo the Deacon, VI, 4; cf. Skylitzes, 285–86; Fr. trans. 240, where the monasteries are named: Damideia in the Armeniakon, recently founded by the emperor, and Mantineion in the Boukellarion. **Update** *The History of Leo the Deacon*, intro., trans., and ann. by Alice-Mary Talbot and Denis F. Sullivan (Washington, DC, 2005), 148; *John Skylitzes, The Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811–1057*, trans. John Wortley (Cambridge, UK, 2010), 273. The same monastery of Mantineion was used by Romanos III Argyros when he discovered a plot involving the Bulgarian leader Prousianos, *ibid.*, 362; Judith Herrin, “Changing Functions of Monasteries for Women during Byzantine Iconoclasm,” in *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience ca. 800–1200*, ed. Lynda Garland (Aldershot, UK, 2006), 1–15.

65. Empress Maria was forced to have her hair cut and to enter a nunnery; see Theophanes Confessor, as earlier, vol. I, 469; Eng. trans. Mango and Scott, 645. The scandal caused by this improper divorce and adultery (*moicheia*) was to divide the church for many years. **Update** See Judith Herrin, *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium* (Princeton, 2002).

66. Ralles-Potles, vol. 5 (1855), 57: judgment of Patriarch Eustratios (in fact, Eustathios, June 1023) ordering a woman illegally married to be tonsured in a monastery, cf. V. Grumel, ed., *Les Regestes des Patriarches de Constantinople*, vol. I, no. 3: *Les Actes (1043–1206)* (Kadiköy, 1947), 933, corrected by W. Seibt, “Prosopographische Konsequenzen der Undatierung von Grumel, Regestes 933 (Patriarch Eustathios austelle von Eustratios),” *JÖB* 22 (1973), 103–15. **Update** See note 64 earlier for monasteries used as prisons for high-ranking women.

67. P. Noailles and A. Dain, *Les Nouvelles de Léon le Sage* (Paris, 1944), 111, 360–63. The law continued to be enforced into the fourteenth century; see A.-M. Talbot, “Late Byzantine Nuns” (as earlier), 115–16.

68. Procopius, *Secret History* 17.5–6, ed. and trans. Dewing (London, 1935), vol. 6, 199; cf. Procopius, *Buildings* 1.9.1–10, ed. and trans. Dewing (1940) 7, 75–77 (where, however, the imperial provision of beautiful buildings and generous maintenance for the women is presumed to “set virtue free”).

69. Psellos, *Chronographia* 4.37; Eng. trans. Sewter, 108.

70. Access to monasteries for all who genuinely desired to adopt the spiritual life was reiterated at the Council in Trullo, c. 43, Ralles-Potles, vol. 2 (1852), 402; Joannou, as earlier, 1, 181; Percival, as earlier, 386. On the social divisions that persisted within, see A. E. Laiou, “Observations on the Life and Ideology of Byzantine Women,” *BF* 9 (1985), 59–102, esp. 89–91.

71. Again the example of St. Irene of Chrysobalanton is instructive; see Rosenqvist, as earlier, note 51; A.-M. Talbot, “Blue-stockings Nuns: Intellectual Life in the Convents of Late Byzantium,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 7 (1983), 604–18; Talbot, “Late Byzantine Nuns,” as earlier, 103–17; Laiou, “Observations,” as earlier, esp. 89–102.

72. Ralles-Potles, vol. 2 (1852), 419; Joannou, as earlier, 1, 186; Percival, as earlier, 388. Cf. Schroeder, as earlier, 112. This regulation continued to be enforced in the fourteenth century; Talbot (1985), 112, n. 28.

73. Psellos, *Chronographia*, bk. 7, 82–3; Eng. trans. 325–26.

74. Rosenqvist, as earlier, ch. 13, documents the case of a Cappadocian noblewoman, whose ex-fiancé had recourse to a sorcerer to try to win her back from St. Irene’s foundation. While the text presents her as willingly renouncing the world and her fiancé, he certainly refused to accept her decision; cf. Herrin, “In Search of

Byzantine Women: Three Avenues of Approach,” [chapter 2](#) in this volume. **Update** John Wortley, *The Spiritually Beneficial Tales of Paul of Monemvasia and of other Authors* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1996).

75. See Laiou, “Observations,” as earlier.

76. For example, the case of Susan, cited in Brock-Harvey, as earlier, 136–41, and the transvestites documented by E. Patlagean, “L’histoire de la femme déguisée en moine et l’évolution de la sainteté féminine à Byzance,” *Studi medievali* 17, no. 2 (1976), 597–623, repr. in her *Structure sociale, famille, chrétienté à Byzance* (London, 1981); M. Delcourt *Hermaphrodite* (London, 1961), esp. app., “Female Saints in Masculine Clothing,” 84–102.

77. See J. Anson, “The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motive,” *Viator* 5 (1974), 1–32; Abrahamse, “Byzantine Asceticism,” as earlier, esp. 39 on the legendary aspect of transvestism in lives of holy women: “a popular tradition of romantic fiction that dominated the biographies of women saints of the fifth and sixth centuries.”

78. For example, AASS NOV 3, 59.528. **Update** Richard Greenfield, ed. and trans., *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion: An Eleventh Century Pillar Saint* (Washington, DC, 2000), ch. 56, 146–47.

79. See, for instance, the sister of a monk who disguised herself in order to enter the shrine of Holy Elias, where she was cured of demonic possession, “Life of St. Elias,” AASS SEPT 3, 82.881–2, or the nun from Constantinople who wanted to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and whose disguise was recognized by Lazaros—he instructed her to go back to her monastery and she did, *The Life of Lazaros*, as earlier, ch. 95, 105–7.

80. An example of this emulation is found in a miraculous story recorded by Paul, tenth-century bishop of Monemvasia; see J. Wortley, *Les récits édifiants de Paul, évêque de Monemvasie et d’autres auteurs* (Paris, 1987), no. 12, 96–103. **Update** Now in Eng. trans., *The Spiritually Beneficial Tales of Paul of Monemvasia*, as earlier.

81. On the alternative domestic model of female sanctity, see Patlagean, “L’histoire de la femme déguisée,” esp. 597, 617–22.

82. AASS NOV 4, 692–705; cf. Kazhdan and Constable, as earlier, 72–75; the *Life* is now translated by Angeliki Laiou; see Talbot, ed., *Holy Women of Byzantium*, 239–89.

83. Canon 79 of the Council of 692 condemned people for preparing and eating a special dish of *semidalis* (a sort of sweet cereal mixture) in honor of the Virgin on the day after the feast of Christ’s birth, a custom that had developed from the secular tradition of congratulating a mother after the successful delivery of a child and had been transplanted into the church. Although women were not specifically mentioned, it seems more than likely that they were responsible. In this way, an unofficial but rather public form of devotion to the *Theotokos* was banned: Joannou, 215–16; Ralles-Potles 486–87. **Update** See the Eng. trans. of the canons in Nedungatt and Featherstone, as earlier.

84. See his *Life*, PG, 100: 1076B–1076D (conversation), 1080A–1080B (dedication). **Update** See the new edition with a Fr. trans. by M.-F. Auzépy, *La Vie d’Etienne le Jeune par Etienne le Diacre* (in note 26 earlier).

85. E. C. Topping, “Byzantine Women Hymnographers,” *Diptycha* 3 (1982–83), 99–111, esp. 105.

86. E. C. Topping, “Thekla the Nun: In Praise of Women,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 25 (1980), 353–70.

87. On this issue of women and icons and for the whole discussion, see “Women and the Faith in Icons in Early Christianity,” [chapter 3](#) in this volume.

88. See the instance of the mother of St. Stephen the Younger (earlier) and F. Halkin, ed., “Sainte Elisabeth d’Héraclée. Abbessé à Constantinople,” *AB* 91 (1973),

sections 3–4, 253–56. **Update** Now translated in Alice-Mary Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium*, 122–35.

89. **Update** See now Judith Herrin, “The Icon Corner in Medieval Byzantium” [chapter 13](#) in this volume.

90. For the courage of women in sustaining iconoclastic persecution, see Theophanes Confessor, vol. 1, 452; Theophanes is of course a biased (that is, iconophile) witness, but it is unusual for women to be singled out.

91. See, for instance, the observations on the relation of contemporary Greek women and icons in M. E. Kenna, “Icons in Theory and Practice: An Orthodox Christian Example,” *History of Religions* 24 (1985), 345–68, esp. 364–65; M. Herzfeld, “Icons and Identity: Religious Orthodoxy and Social Practice in Rural Crete,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 63 (1990), 109–21.

92. R. Huschon, “Essential Objects and the Sacred,” in *Women and Space*, ed. S. Ardener (London, 1981), 72–88.

93. R. S. Nelson, “The Discourse of Icons: Then and Now,” *Art History* 12 (1989), 144–57.

THE IMPERIAL FEMININE IN BYZANTIUM



Defining the precise powers of an empress demands a broad knowledge of “the unwritten constitution of the Byzantine Empire” as well as particular examples of female initiatives, and even then it proves difficult. Yet from the Late Antique period onward, instances of empresses apparently influencing their husbands, consorts, and sons suggest that they could exercise considerable power. And in marked contrast to the medieval West or the Islamic world, powerful Byzantine women were more readily accepted. How did this distinct authority develop and sustain itself?

In this investigation I found the imperial capital of Constantinople an amazing resource, with its collection of statues, often female, its imperial spaces (both within the Great Palace and outside in the city), and the development of the cult of the Virgin Mother of God—guardian and protector of the city. While texts about imperial women, nearly all written by men, always presented linguistic, rhetorical, and genre problems, physical and visual material noted in the *Scriptores Originum Constantinopolitanarum* and the *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* suggested different ways of interpretation. Very little is articulated, least of all by women, but clear traces of female agency can be unearthed from the stories that circulated about statues of imperial women, their unexpected adventures, and building activities (whether accurate or false). These “Brief Notes” provided many totally inaccurate histories, which nonetheless revealed something of the unknown authors’ belief. In their deceptively simple presentation of facts they also allude to empresses who broke with protocol without provoking any horror or dismay.

An additional feature of these collections is that they document the afterlife of past events, which continued to generate attention on imperial women centuries after their deaths. A similar persistence lies behind commemorative rituals designed to recall the history of Constantinople—its foundation by Constantine I, the anniversary of major military triumphs, the transference of particularly sacred relics or icons, and natural phenomena such as the terrifying earthquakes that caused destruction in the city. The identification of statues; the names of monasteries, palaces, poorhouses, and soup kitchens; inscriptions that recorded repairs to the city walls as well as major new foundations, all this often inaccurate information helped to compose a narrative of the city’s life. In the process the recollection of female members of the imperial families of times past made its own contribution and ensured some knowledge of their lives and achievements. And later empresses drew on this store of information to justify their claims to rule and to influence their male relatives.

EVER SINCE EDWARD GIBBON WROTE his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* the phrase has captured a vital process in the historical

development of Europe. It is often forgotten that he went on to chronicle the history of the East Roman Empire, which we call Byzantium, through its millennial existence right up to its final conquest by the Ottoman Turks. By extending his definition of “Roman,” Gibbon effectively wrote a history of the East Mediterranean to the middle of the fifteenth century. He found the eastern Romans of the Middle Ages, centered on their capital Constantinople, an effete and ineffectual lot. He was particularly offended by the promotion of some of the wives of emperors to equal positions of authority. In contrast, his enthusiasm for the Arab tribes who entered the historical arena in the seventh century is unmistakable—here at last, he implies, were some vigorous warriors, inspired by the genius of their prophet Muhammad, their religious dedication, and military ability.¹

Despite many efforts to correct Gibbon’s vivid account, his view of Byzantium still informs both scholarly and popular awareness. This is particularly unfortunate in respect of his treatment of imperial women from Theodora in the sixth century to Irene in the eighth and on to Anne of Savoy in the fourteenth, though he praises Eudokia Makrembolitissa and Anna Komnene as educated females.² His presentation requires radical rethinking. Some notable contributions have already set the achievements of outstanding women associated with supreme power in Byzantium in a more satisfying context.³ The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the cultural heritage, the imperial precedents and variety of visual models on which such powerful Byzantine empresses could draw. In particular, I hope to demonstrate that by the eighth and ninth centuries there were significant resources available that might permit imperial authority to adopt feminine forms.

The reason for this chronological framework lies in the prominence of two empresses, Irene and Theodora, during the periods of iconoclasm (roughly calculated from 730 to 843). Both reversed bans imposed on the veneration of icons. Irene set a precedent by summoning the Seventh Ecumenical Council held in 787, which justified icons and restored them to a central position in the church, while Theodora is commemorated as a saint for her role in ending the second phase of iconoclasm in 843. The belief of icon venerators (iconophiles) that prayers addressed to an image are transmitted to the venerated saint or holy person depicted on it (the prototype) had long been established. St. Basil of Caesarea first developed it, probably from pre-Christian imperial traditions, though it was not until the seventh century that devotional practices intensified the cult. When and how this theology was matched by paintings that can be historically documented is much debated. Whether women played a

significant role in promoting the cult of such images is similarly disputed. Probably women did not introduce any novel aspects into the practice of venerating icons. But they may have found it particularly satisfying, because it did not require the services of a priest, or the context of a church; icons could be venerated at home in the privacy of female domestic space.⁴

This is an obvious point. In the context of an utterly patriarchal society, women's activity was necessarily restricted. By the seventh century icon veneration was a practice sanctioned like most ecclesiastical rituals by the male clergy who ran the church. Through their personal devotions women reproduced it. But when the equally patriarchal imperial system turned against it, women persisted in this once-dominant tradition.⁵ Even as the male authorities decreed otherwise, they actively resisted the policy of iconoclasm, hiding icons in their private quarters, and instructing their children in the rituals of veneration. These women were, so to speak, the preservers of a tradition that had previously been overseen by men. In their efforts to sustain iconophile belief, empresses especially, as well as many anonymous women and men, contributed to the survival of Byzantium as we know it, and therefore to its revival and the great medieval flowering of its artistic and intellectual achievements.

The exceptional history of this turning point and the contribution of the empresses to it demands extensive treatment.⁶ But it also poses a preliminary question. How did these two empresses muster the skills, determination, and means to play the role they did? There must have been resources in the interstices of Byzantine society, in myths, in liturgical practice and religious beliefs, and in the symbols surrounding them, that they could draw upon. Such resources, which I will term the "imperial feminine," are indeed found in a rich vein of traditions, images, and customs that all manifest a relationship of women with authority and power—in a subordinate and supporting role, to be sure, but one that was nonetheless imperial. So the title of this chapter does not reflect the role of the empresses of the iconoclast era, rather it addresses activities and representations dating from the fifth to the seventh centuries, which created a potential that later female rulers could exploit.

Three dynamic strands of this imperial feminine may be singled out. The first lies in the Late Antique transition from a Roman to a Christian society, which witnesses the introduction of the Virgin as a novel symbol of maternity into an environment dominated visually by pagan monuments. It develops in symbiosis with imperial and civic rites into a powerful new cult. The second springs from the process of adapting imperial structures to accommodate the needs of dynasty and inherited claims to rule, necessarily transmitted by women. And the

third, and perhaps most crucial element, lies in the development of New Rome, Constantinople, the eastern capital of the empire, where imperial and public space, court structures, and rituals allowed ruling women to elaborate new roles. From the intersection of elements of these three strands the feminine is frequently associated with imperial power. This is a discontinuous phenomenon rather than any systematic combination. But it seems to have legitimized female access to an autocratic use of power, and it revealed and preserved spaces (political and geographical) that women could utilize. It neither encouraged nor forbade this access. Rather, in exceptional circumstances, precedents in image and story permitted women to adopt a “male” exploitation of forces within the imperial court.

FROM ROMAN TO CHRISTIAN BYZANTIUM

Pagan Presence

I shall begin with an obvious but often overlooked visual presence: the existence in Byzantium of numerous images of empresses. In the *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, a strange collection of stories about the monuments of medieval Constantinople, there are many references to statues of Helena, the mother of Constantine I. Among the eighty Christian statues redistributed around the city by Justinian, there were three of Helena: “one of porphyry and [other] marbles, another with silver inlay on a bronze column and the other of ivory.”⁷ Several composite statues of Helena and Constantine together, often holding the True Cross, also adorned the capital city (for example, at the Forum of Constantine; at the Milion; at the Senate House, one in porphyry; at the Forum Bovis; and at the Philadelphion). Helena is the first in a long line of mothers, sisters, daughters, and wives of emperors commemorated in porphyry, bronze, silver, and marble who were understood as powerful women.⁸

Theodore the Lector’s “Brief Catalogue of Women,” which is only known because it was included in the *Parastaseis*, records the survival of statues of two near-contemporaries of Helena: Fausta and Anastasia, the unhappy spouses of Constantine I and Julian. The largest number represented women of the ruling dynasties of the fifth to eighth centuries and were often in group sculptures: Eudoxia and her daughters; Pulcheria with her husband, Marcian; Verina, wife of Leo I; Arcadia and Ariadne, wives of Zeno; Euphemia; Eudokia; Sophia and her daughter Arabia and niece Helena; Justinian and Theodora, and their homonyms, Justinian II and his wife Theodora. This last one stood at the Basilika, a place where Theodora’s Khazar relatives and

their Bulgarian allies received payment of tribute during Justinian II's second reign (705–11), and it is identified by this topographical association.⁹ Although the emperor was remembered as a tyrant, the compilers of the *Parastaseis* believed that he had commemorated his triumphant return to imperial power in this group statue. Previous commentators, however, had identified it as Byzas and Phidaleia, the mythical founders of Byzantium. So there was much doubt as to the actual rulers depicted. The problem is recognized by the compilers of the *Parastaseis*, who emphasize that these statues were still visible at the time of writing (*heos tes semeron*), and could be inspected by those who wished to understand ancient monuments.¹⁰

Among the famous statues mentioned in the text, one reveals a distinct exercise of female agency. From a notorious incident that occurred at the end of the fourth century, we know that a silver statue of the empress Eudoxia was set up on a porphyry column in the Augousteion close to the cathedral church, when John Chrysostom was bishop. It commemorated her acclamation as *augusta* (empress) and was inaugurated “with applause and popular spectacles of dances and mimes, as was then customary on the erection of the statues of the emperors.”¹¹ Sozomen and Socrates report the protests made by the bishop at the openly pagan celebrations that accompanied the statue's installation.

Whether this was in fact a cause of John's clash with the empress or not, the discovery of the base and the survival of a bilingual Greek and Latin inscription provide independent confirmation of Eudoxia's statue.¹² It was not the only statue of her: Theodore also records a very large one in silver (of Eudoxia with her daughters), another in bronze on a pillar.¹³

Later Christian commentators were clearly aware of the scandal connected with this statue. Eudoxia was gratified by its erection, and the festive accompaniments were part of the tradition of raising statues on columns, the ancient commemoration of rulers. The incident serves as a reminder of the pre-Christian traditions of the East Roman Empire that survived, albeit in different forms, into the medieval period, while they fell away in the West. The tension resulting from two quite different styles of public commemoration, one imperial and associated with ancient customs, the other religious and devoted to the invisible Christian God, characterized Byzantium to the very end.

In medieval Constantinople, therefore, there was a continuing presence of commemorations of empresses; they were a notable reminder of the power and prominence of certain imperial women, whether carved in very valuable marble or cast in precious metal. Some were attached to public monuments, others stood at major

intersections, most were identified by inscription, like Eudoxia's.¹⁴ Even though they were certainly outnumbered by statues of male rulers, there was no shortage of representations of imperial authority in feminine form in medieval Constantinople. Writers also thought them worthy of note and recorded their existence in such lists. And because they depicted individuals, accurately named and connected with imperial activities, there was less possibility of confusing them with statues of ancient goddesses or the Muses, traditionally shown in ancient costume with their attributes, which also continued to decorate the cities of Late Antiquity.

The importance of these statues is that they were of actual, historical characters. In addition, of course, there were the familiar tropes of the female figure as an allegory, a typical device whereby the feminine figure serves to naturalize male authority.¹⁵ In this category there is one peculiar imperial association of female allegory: the image of an empress on the steelyard, or measuring arm. On this everyday object in common daily use an imperial figure, frequently feminine, represented the ruling power. Steelyards were used for measuring fairly small quantities (up to four Roman pounds), possibly rather valuable commodities such as spices or precious metals.¹⁶ In this guise the imperial responsibility for overseeing correct measurement is personified by a female figure who embodies the guarantee of accuracy and an assurance of good measure. Very large numbers are found at many Late Antique sites scattered throughout the empire. On rare occasions male emperor weights were also used or Athena was represented.¹⁷ But the overriding association of correct weight is with an imperial feminine. A similar connection occurs on miniature statuettes of imperial virtue, some female, others male, which encouraged private devotion to the imperial cult.¹⁸

Such weights are sometimes identified not as empresses but as embodiments of the city of Constantinople, a further confusion between different forms of power. And flat weights also display the *Tyche* or Fortune of a ruling city.¹⁹ But the city of Constantinople, also characterized by the adjective *basilissa*, which may also be translated "ruling city," "queen city," or "queen of cities," is traditionally represented as a female personification—as for example on the Esquiline treasure, which also has representations of other ancient cities.²⁰ The Byzantine metropolis continued to be depicted in this way throughout its history, with specific ideological resonance for empresses. While the other capitals lost all physical reality and thus became nothing but allegories, new urban foundations, though just as feminine, could make no claim to the ruling epithet. Although there should have been ways of distinguishing the symbolic person of the capital city from the person of a female imperial portrait, the

confusion between the two remained. And only Constantinople sustained its peculiar character in visual forms that could be used to strengthen the idea of a female ruler.

So a female figure associated with accurate measurement, looking like an empress or labeled with the name of an ancient city of great renown, enhanced the imperial feminine. Such personifications of Constantinople in clearly female form survive from the fourth century, and New Rome is clearly distinguished from Old Rome by attributes that reflect their position and character.²¹ The twin capitals have different helmets; Old Rome is traditionally shown with her right breast bare (not a characteristic confined to Amazons) and she carries the cross-banded orb; New Rome, the city of Constantine, carries a torch and a cornucopia of produce. Constantinople is further identified by a mural crown or *modius*, which probably represents the walls of the city of Constantine, inaugurated in 330.²² In the calendar of 354 Old Rome and New Rome are both associated with sacks of gold; Constantinople is also crowned with a wreath by two putti; and the putti holding candlesticks, who accompany Alexandria, perhaps indicate “the celebrations traditionally held in honor of these city *Tyches* as benefactors of the cities themselves and of the empire as a whole.”²³

Whether these figures were always understood as representing a specifically imperial quality is not clear. Personifications of Rome and Constantinople are attested on the coinage of Constantius II in 343, a sign that they were recognized as the most important capital cities.²⁴ By the sixth century during the reign of Justin II one representation of Constantinople was said to be of Aphrodite, thus suggesting an older, pagan model.²⁵ This confusion between great cities in feminine form and ancient goddesses was sustained for many centuries through different media, for example, ninth- and tenth-century Psalter illustration, where not only cities, but also rivers and geographical features, regularly adopt a female personified form. They jostle together with allegorical depictions of the Muses or virtues, traditionally shown as ancient goddesses, scantily clad in togas with bare arms, shoulders, and ankles.²⁶ While they occur in illuminations of the Psalms and thus represent Old Testament figures of the dim and distant past, they also embody Christian virtues, which all are enjoined to imitate. If Melodia (Song) inspires David in composition, Sophia (Wisdom) is at his other shoulder to supply the ideas of perseverance, courage, and faith in God.

During the Late Antique period, that is, prior to the sixth century when pagan cults were finally outlawed, women had regularly represented power and legitimacy as well as embodying important virtues. Artists always depicted those with imperial responsibilities in

their regalia; for personified elements and the Muses they usually employed an ancient style of clothing that revealed their naked arms, shoulders, legs, and feet, in ways considered indecent by later Christian authors. So when they were asked to paint female martyrs and Christian saints, artists normally showed them in very modest attire that completely covers their hair and their limbs, adopting the form of dress appropriate to humble Byzantine women. This was characterized by long robes and head coverings that entirely obscured the body and hid the hair. Only in exceptional cases, such as that of St. Mary of Egypt who survived in the desert with no clothing at all, is there any concession to the naked features of the feminine form, a hallmark of pagan sculptures.

A feminine element in the decoration of the cities of the East Mediterranean therefore took many forms. Statues of pagan goddesses, the Muses, and personifications of virtue preserved in their dress, or lack of it, the ancient Greek ideas of beauty. In contrast, secular portraits and three-dimensional sculptures of Christian women were marked out by clothing that covered them from head to toe, either in their imperial attire, as empresses, or in the simple garments of Christian martyrs and saints. Although they were certainly outnumbered by representations of men, these female types of public statuary functioned in a similar fashion—to draw attention to the achievements of past heroes (often legendary) and famous leaders. In addition, they were considered an adornment of any city and an essential element in the collective memory of its past.

The Cult of the Virgin

Into this method of differentiating female figures, the Virgin Mary fitted without difficulty. As the mother of Jesus, Mary represented an unattainable level of Christian virtue but was also documented, however briefly, in the Gospel stories as a genuine female person. Since her origins and early life receive hardly any attention there, apocryphal texts attempted to fill the tantalizing gap. The Protevangelion of James reconstructed in greater detail the key stages of her life, which formed the basis for her feasts: her semi-miraculous conception and birth; the outstanding qualities that set her apart from childhood on; her protected life in the Temple, where she was selected to weave the purple and red threads used only for the veil; and her obedience even when betrothed to the elderly Joseph. Guided by these amplifications, artists emphasized the humble origins of this extraordinary woman, chosen to become the Mother of God, *Meter Theou*.

Her cult did not go back to the moment of the foundation of

Constantine's new capital, but developed rapidly during the early fifth-century debate over her precise role in the Incarnation. After the Council of Ephesos in 431, which decreed that Mary should be called by the title, *Theotokos* (literally, the one who bore God), her elevated status was stressed in new visual forms.²⁷ A major impetus to her iconography may perhaps be traced to the alleged discovery by Empress Eudokia in Jerusalem of a portrait of the Virgin and Christ Child, said to have been painted by St. Luke, no less.²⁸ While this story is probably a later invention, the idea of a painting from life dating from the first century AD may have stimulated group representations of the Holy Mother and Child. Later tradition connects the arrival of Eudokia's icon in Constantinople with the foundation of the Hodegetria church by Empress Pulcheria, who was to all intents and purposes running the imperial court in the early fifth century. Her own identification with the role of Mary in giving birth to God, through special pre-Christmas vigils, built on and in turn encouraged a lay enthusiasm for the Advent feast.²⁹ And her participation in the weekly evening vigils, processions, and liturgies associated with the Hodegetria church drew on civic ceremonial as well as novel sermons by Patriarch Proclus on the power of the Virgin, which stressed her significance as Mother of God.³⁰

The empress's patronage of monuments dedicated to the Ever-Virgin Mother of God (*Aeiparthenos Theotokos*) undoubtedly played a major part in establishing the new cult in the capital. In this respect it corresponded to a religious context that permitted empresses to respond to theological developments, to establish new shrines for saintly relics, exemplified by the movements of the bones of St. Stephen for which Pulcheria founded one of her first churches in the capital. This established a pattern of imperial patronage specific to ruling women, which is often linked to their monastic foundations. Religious communities provided a loyal support and refuge for empresses, who frequently retired to them when widowed.

During the fifth century the cult of Mary attained immense importance in Constantinople, where she gradually took over the role of *Tyche* (Fortuna) and became the city's major protector.³¹ Empress Pulcheria accelerated this replacement of the ancient patron of the capital that formed part of the process of Christianization, promoting the cult of the Virgin and the development of her feasts. She also seems to have initiated building at the sites of the Chalkoprateia and Blachernai churches, which a generation later received the most important Marian relics: her veil, the *omophorion* or *maphorion*, also called *pallium*; and her girdle, *zone* (also identified in certain sources as a robe, *esthes*, or shroud, *entaphia spargana*, *peristolia*).³² The discovery of these few witnesses to her earthly life and their transfer

to the capital of the empire spurred a further stage in the growth of the cult. Leo I and his wife Verina established a magnificent shrine in the church at Blachernai for the precious veil, deposited in a gold and jewel encrusted reliquary, *soros*, above which the imperial couple installed an icon of themselves flanking the enthroned Virgin. Another icon of the two officials who had discovered the veil and brought it to Constantinople was set up in the church.³³ Images and relics such as these were to play a large part in establishing Mary as the spiritual guardian of the city. There is no surviving artistic record of this celebrated shrine, which burned down in the early eleventh century. It is possible, however, that a sixth-century icon from Mount Sinai may encapsulate the form employed, in which the Virgin is seated on a simple throne, with the Christ Child on her lap, flanked by two military saints with two angels overhead, the whole ensemble framed by a background of architectural features, also found on icons of the same date.³⁴ If so, the lost Blachernai icon would have represented a woman with tremendous influence.

There is a curious corollary to the imperial impetus to the fifth-century cult of the Virgin, which brings into even closer association the activities of empresses and the growing power of the *Theotokos*. It can be seen by comparing the visual representations of the Virgin in West and East. Once the enhanced status of the Virgin became established in Rome, the first church dedicated to her cult was constructed by Pope Sixtus III in the period 432–40. At Santa Maria Maggiore, the Virgin was probably shown enthroned in resplendent mosaic in the apse, now destroyed. Similar representations on the triumphal arch reveal an imperial and imperious figure, a ruler, albeit of the kingdom of Heaven.³⁵ The same emphasis is evident in a number of very damaged frescos, and finds its ultimate expression in the painted icon at Trastevere, which reveals fully imperial associations. This Mary is undoubtedly an empress, wearing the crown with pearl hangings, a heavily bejeweled imperial costume in brilliant colors associated with purple-dyed silk, embroidered in gold and silver thread.³⁶

The context in which such Western images of Mary, the Queen of Heaven, were forged suggests that in some way she replaced the empresses of the Roman Empire in the West, who disappeared during the fifth century. Some had been commemorated on coins, for example Galla Placidia, who was buried in her mausoleum at Ravenna in 450.³⁷ By 476, however, Romulus Augustulus was deposed and empresses became a thing of the past. In the absence of real empresses wearing their traditional costume, an overtly imperial representation of the Virgin was adopted, as if to compensate for the lack of an imperial family resident in the West. Through images of *Maria Regina*

Western Christendom claimed its own share of the inheritance of past glory and transposed it to the heavenly realm. This tradition, developed in Rome, provided a model not only for much later artists but also for those responsible for the striking sixth-century mosaics at Durazzo.³⁸

In contrast, in the East, empresses like Pulcheria already monopolized all the symbolic trappings of imperial power. A clear example is provided by ivory plaques that depict a female Eastern ruler, probably the empress Ariadne.³⁹ Here she wears the crown with pendant pearls, carries the orb and sceptre, wears the imperial *loros*, in this case with a victorious emperor depicted on the panel (*tablion*) that flaps across the chest. This ruling woman is in every way identified as an empress. The imperial feminine in the East meant that actual human empresses had cornered the use of full imperial regalia. Mary, therefore, had to be shown differently, hence the typical presentation of the Virgin in the simple attire of her Byzantine images: a dark blue or red gown, occasionally edged with gold thread; a paler blue, purple, or brown head covering, *maphorion*; and no jewelery of any sort. From the earliest surviving monuments that record her presence, the Virgin wears this deeply unregal costume.⁴⁰ The only sartorial expression of her superior associations are the red slippers, an echo of footwear reserved to emperors. Hans Belting has drawn attention to the Western image of the Virgin shown with the insignia of imperial power “which she never was at Byzantium” but does not provide an explanation.⁴¹ A recent study by Henry Maguire, however, confirms that it was the hold maintained by the women of the imperial court on their exclusive right to wear Byzantine regalia that made impossible an Eastern version of the *Maria Regina* image. The first time Christ and the Virgin appear in imperial costume occurs only outside the empire in Kastoria and on the eve of the Ottoman conquest in 1384–85. The church of St. Athanasios patronized by a local Albanian family, the Musachi, depicts the heavenly court in Byzantine imperial dress. In effect, Eastern images of the Virgin as empress do not appear until the last earthly empresses had disappeared.⁴²

It is in the humble, typically Byzantine guise that the figure of the Mother of God becomes familiar throughout the Christian world, and is commemorated in such notable churches in Byzantium (apse mosaics of St. Sophia in Constantinople and Thessalonike), up the Adriatic coast to Torcello and Venice, north of the Black Sea to Kiev. She is an imperial figure by virtue of her hieratic pose, dominating the viewer as she presents her son, the Son of God, to the human world. But she could not be depicted as an empress, because females of the imperial family were already shown in this way. And not only living

empresses: Constantine I's mother, Helena, was also shown in full regalia, for instance in the Psalters, as well as all subsequent sainted empresses, for example Theophano and Eudokia, the first and third wives of Leo VI.⁴³ Of course, imperial costume was always severely restricted. The only holy figures permitted to wear it are the Archangels, and they are sexless winged beings that can never be mistaken for emperors.⁴⁴

Her costume did not prevent the Virgin from assuming an active role as a divine protector of the ruling city of Constantinople, and she was believed to have physically combated the Avaro-Slavonic invaders of 626 by fighting on the walls beside the citizen militia.⁴⁵ By the early tenth century it was possible to show her as the patron to whom Constantine I had dedicated his new city and Justinian had presented his main church, although of course it is dedicated to Holy Wisdom. For this is how she appears in the mosaic of the southwest vestibule of the church, seated on a throne receiving her city from its imperial founder and her church from its builder. By this date, her capacity to defend the city had been tested on numerous occasions, as documented in the sermons of Photios, who also devoted a particularly important one to her image in the apse, which was unveiled on Sunday, 29 March 867.⁴⁶ At a time when her cult was growing ever stronger, as a result of the restoration of icons, there was no question of developing the iconography of her powers in an earthly, imperial direction. The established tradition of simple dark blue robe sufficed to delineate the supreme power of the chief defender of the ruling city.

From this contrast between images of the Virgin in East and West, it is evident that traditional representations of ruling women in their imperial regalia reserve to the Byzantine empress what the West bestowed on its substitute, the heavenly empress. Thus differences in church-state relations may be encoded in the contrasting images of the Virgin. Her modest dress in Byzantium is a consequence of the Eastern Empire's continuity and its preoccupation with the secular aspects of power, the glistening insignia of imperial office, with its extravagant insistence on the use of gold and gems. When Western artists wished to celebrate her as Queen of Heaven, they drew on the developed *Maria Regina* type preserved on Roman icons, complete with imperial costume. Although the image of Christ crowning Mary as Queen of Heaven dates from the twelfth century, it has direct links back to these precedents. Conversely, there was no fixed iconography of the wives of Western rulers, even those of the Holy Roman emperors of the West.

Since the religious sphere provided women with limited opportunities for self-expression, it is not surprising that the cult of

the Virgin constitutes perhaps the most striking example of the role of the imperial feminine in shaping Byzantine culture. In particular, Pulcheria's devotion to the Ever-Virgin Mother of God reflected both her own dedication to chastity as well as her concentrated patronage of this relative newcomer to the ranks of the saints. Through the innovation of night vigils, processions, and liturgies connected with her relics, Pulcheria helped to establish her cycle of feast days: from her Birth and Presentation in the Temple, to the Annunciation, and so on to her Assumption.⁴⁷ In addition, all this activity built up a close association between the heavenly powers of the *Aeiparthenos* and purely earthly powers attributed to human empresses. The two spheres are mutually reinforced by Corippus on the occasion of Justin II's coronation in 565. In the prayer attributed to the Empress Sophia, a clear analogy is made between the Virgin's imperial attributes and those powers Sophia now assumes as empress.⁴⁸

While emperors, patriarchs, monks, and ordinary men were also dedicated to the service of the Virgin, her presence in the city, her relics, and their miraculous powers seem to have special influence in the lives of Byzantine women. The example of the mother of St. Stephen the Younger is surely not an isolated case.⁴⁹ It purports to document the devotion of one anonymous woman to the Blachernai shrine, where she participated in the special liturgy every Friday. In her private prayers she begged the Virgin to grant her a son (she already had daughters), and promised to dedicate him to her service. This association of the Virgin with miraculous cures of sterility or infertility among women seems to have been widespread. It draws attention to yet another strand in the development of the imperial feminine, the duty of empresses to produce legitimate sons who could inherit their father's power.

FROM ANCIENT TO MEDIEVAL BYZANTIUM: THE DEVELOPMENT OF DYNASTY

In Byzantium the growth of this dynastic thrust is evident from the time of Constantine I onward, but it becomes more pronounced during the fifth century and dominant by the seventh. Initially, it is more concerned with the problem of imperial succession when a ruler dies without an heir. On such occasions the female relatives of the deceased may be expected to play a vital role in the transmission of imperial power. The tradition had been developed in Rome and was employed throughout the Roman world. Thus Pulcheria, whose commitment to everlasting virginity characterized her adult life, agreed to a fictive marriage to an elderly general Marcian, on the

death of Theodosius II.⁵⁰ And later in the fifth century Ariadne, who may be the female ruler commemorated in ivory panels, was required by the senate of Constantinople to choose a husband to whom she could transmit the imperial name.⁵¹ As the daughter of one emperor and widow of another, it was recognized that Ariadne had imperial blood in her veins as no one else did. She was already elderly and might be past childbearing age, but nonetheless her imperial credentials were so strong that whomever she selected to become her husband would accede to imperial authority through her. So the senate deferred to her choice, and her portrait, together with that of Anastasios, adorns the surviving consular diptychs of his reign, a tribute to her prior claim on imperial power.⁵²

Christian marriage further enhanced the development of a dynastic preoccupation in Byzantium. Emperors were united with their wives according to the Christian idea of marriage as a lifelong commitment; divorce in elite circles gradually became much less common. And the Christian iconography of marriage supplied one very significant element in the dynastic emphasis of Byzantine ruling families: the image of Christ blessing the couple that is found on Late Antique coins as well as on many rings and wedding belts. As this image was transferred to the imperial couple, and their marriages were commemorated on coins, it extended its meaning beyond the mutual duties of the persons joined in marriage to the shared responsibilities of the couple ruling over the Christian empire.⁵³ Surviving examples of such depictions indicate that in Byzantium the female partner of the ruler shared in the supreme authority invested in his office. In many of them Christ is shown as the ultimate source of this power. Standing between the imperial couple, he endows male and female alike, blessing their association and implying that both shared his approval. The emperor and empress were subsequently commemorated in numerous family images together with their children, the longed-for and anticipated consequence of their marriage. From written sources it is known that many adorned the Great Palace; others were erected on public monuments such as the Milion, which no longer survive. Similar images appear in manuscripts. It is clear that this type of record of imperial power continued throughout the empire's existence.

Many of these have perished. But a late example survives in the southeast gallery of St. Sophia in Constantinople, where there are two particularly important imperial group portraits: one dating from the mid-eleventh century that commemorates Empress Zoe with her third husband, Constantine IX Monomachos; and one from the twelfth representing John II Komnenos and his wife Irene.⁵⁴ In both, the imperial couple flank the figure of Christ or the Virgin, to whom they present gifts (a sack of gold, an imperial donation recorded in a

written scroll). John and Irene are accompanied by their son Alexios. These mosaics are among the few that survive from a much larger number, for which there are only written descriptions. On such images the empress fulfills her primary role as wife of the emperor. For her primary role is to bear him legitimate heirs who will inherit the empire and maintain the dynasty. In this respect Irene performed admirably; she bore the emperor four daughters and four sons, of whom the youngest, Manuel, succeeded his father in 1143 and ruled for more than thirty years. Successful imperial families are often depicted at the beginning of manuscripts commissioned by the emperor—for instance, the portrait of Eudokia, wife of Basil I, and her two sons, Leo and Alexander, who both became emperor.⁵⁵

These images illustrate perfectly the “normal” dynastic role of empress as consort. According to this definition, the feminine counterpart of the emperor should perform a supportive role, accompanying the ruler on social engagements, at religious festivals and important court events, diplomatic receptions, anniversaries, and so on. The role can be undertaken by other female relatives: a wife is preferable, but there must be a woman at the apex of Byzantine courtly society. In 613, after his first wife’s death, Herakleios crowned his one-year-old daughter *augusta*, as if the court could not function without a nominal empress.⁵⁶ A similar situation occurred under Leo VI, who remarked when he crowned his daughter as empress: “Not having an empress it was impossible to celebrate the banquets according to the prescribed tradition and custom.”⁵⁷ In the great ceremonial events the roles of the imperial couple are clearly gendered and complementary, and, however subordinate, the female part became essential to the expression of the male imperial role. Their joint rule is symbolized by the couple’s imperial robes of office, their crowns and regalia, the official costume that identifies them as rulers.⁵⁸ The empress has a vital role to perform that may permit her to overstep the “constitutional” limits of her given power.

The crown jewels of most modern monarchies have their origin in Byzantium and always include official uniforms, complete with sashes, medals, and other marks of distinction, plus hats (crowns), shoes, swords, staffs, or other emblems of office for both male and female partners. In countries where male primogeniture has given way to the rights of the first-born regardless of sex, women are regularly called upon to wear these heavy costumes at their coronations. Similarly, in Byzantium wives of emperors were required to pose for official portraits in their regalia, and it is in this official pose that they are nearly always depicted. Coins, of course, are frequently the most formal record of imperial status, so when women assume imperial power this is the first and sometimes only medium on which their

images survive.⁵⁹ The depiction of the imperial couple in their extravagant gold, bejeweled costumes is, however, one of the trademarks of Byzantine ideology, and it includes a feminine component in the partnership.

In the development of a stronger dynastic concern, the empress may not receive the actual *title* of empress at her marriage to the emperor. Her coronation as *augusta* may be delayed until she gives birth to a son, or for a variety of other reasons. Constantine V crowned his third wife Eudokia, who was the mother of his five sons, about fifteen years after their marriage. Nonetheless, this draws attention to the fundamental function of the emperor's wife, which is fecundity. Unless the empress gives birth to children, preferably male, she fails in her duty.

These two aspects of the empress's duty constitute what I would call the minimal definition of the imperial feminine. First, the empress has an important role as the hostess of the court. She receives the wives of senators when they attend the emperor, and she leads a feminine counterpoint to the male ceremonial. Second, she is expected to produce the emperor's successor and as the mother of the heir may have an opportunity to influence the next ruler.⁶⁰

IMPERIAL SPACE IN THE CONTEXT OF CONSTANTINOPLE

There are, however, broader, more significant aspects to the imperial feminine, which develop in the context of the third strand of resources—the overall environment and topography of Constantinople. Despite the straitjacket of the model of Old Rome, which laid down the basic plan, the new capital presented an opportunity for a certain novelty and within it a feminine space was created. In the court of Constantinople established in the Great Palace, the empress had relative independence in her own quarters; there she controlled her own staff and treasury. She also had at her disposal the assistance of a whole range of eunuchs, who held official positions reserved to the men without beards. The geographical privilege was made possible by the enhanced range of sexuality, with the eunuch *corps de chambre* guarding and policing the female quarters of the palace. With her own means of patronage the empress could fund the building of new shrines and set up her own monasteries as secure retreats to which she could withdraw once her active political role came to an end. Finally, the field of imperial ideology and ceremonial gave an empress the opportunity to influence foreign policy, as well as introducing new activities. Diplomacy required particular forms of reception, and alliances were often sealed by marriages, in which empresses

necessarily played an important part if their children were involved.

In the development of a discontinuous pattern, the weakness of the rules governing the behavior of empresses is a key factor.⁶¹ Of course, certain activities were prescribed. Empresses were expected to participate in all the court ceremonies, a full liturgical year of receptions and visits to churches, monasteries, and shrines outside the palace. They were required to supervise most activities within the female quarters of the palace, especially those involving the education of their young children. But sometimes an empress might do something quite unprecedented, as happened in 718 to Maria, the wife of Leo III. After her coronation as *augusta*, in recognition of her success in the fertility stakes, their young son Constantine was to be baptized by the patriarch in the church of St. Sophia. "She solemnly processed alone to the Great Church, without her husband. After praying in front of the sanctuary doors, she went over to the Great Baptistery, which her husband had entered earlier with a few members of his household." After Patriarch Germanos had baptized the child, she "returned in procession with her baptized son and distributed largess on her way from the church to the Bronze Gate of the palace."⁶² Whether she was forced to perform this act alone by Leo's refusal to accompany her is not clear. But she apparently made a perfectly good ceremony out of it. At least it is recorded that what she did was not seen as something unacceptable.

Even when excluded from the formal circles of political power, certain empresses continued to play a significant role in the life of the empire. Enforced retirement to a nunnery, which is so often considered a form of banishment and indeed plunged many empresses into an undocumented, final phase of their lives, might yet provide empresses with a context from which to plot.⁶³ Communities of dedicated women occasionally encouraged such activities, which represent a definite attempt to influence the political and religious life of the empire. And finally, even in death, empresses might yet establish a venue from which other females of the ruling family could gain inspiration. Visiting the tombs of the deceased was a procedure sanctioned by the church and often stipulated by wills, which obliged descendants to provide food and hospitality for a certain number of poor folk on the anniversaries of their relatives' deaths.⁶⁴ In the fulfillment of these activities younger members of the dynasty might find ways of stepping outside the boundaries of what empresses "normally" did.

Devotion to the cult of the Virgin might also permit the empress to undertake private visits to her shrines beyond the palace. A graphic illustration comes from the collection of mythical stories about the capital city of the empire, which record and try to explain an amusing

tale concerning the so-called monastery of Haste (*spoude*). In a brief account, the hurried incident that gave rise to this name and occurred in the reign of Leo III (717–41) is described as follows: “The lady Anna, wife of Leo born in Syria, coming from [a visit to] Blachernai when she was pregnant and at the time when she should deliver herself, going down to the house of a certain *protospatharios* she gave birth [there]. And she purchased the house and called it the monastery of haste, because the imminent birth hurried her there before she could get back to the palace.”⁶⁵ *Spoude*, however, can mean zeal as well as haste and the compiler has selected the meaning to fit his account.⁶⁶

As is to be expected with such stories, its details are incorrect: indeed they may have been concocted to explain an otherwise odd name attached to a particular monastery. Whether or not the text can be read as a record of fact (the incident may never have occurred), the compilers of the *Patria* believed that such a journey was possible and that imperial women might make it. The same source preserves another tale of the ninth-century Empress Theodora making the same journey, also in conditions of pregnancy, albeit not so advanced. The area along the route from the Great Palace to Blachernai was also known for its spacious palaces. Theodora’s daughter Thekla was associated with the area when she retired to one of these villas.⁶⁷ Of course, the whole court regularly visited the celebrated shrine of Blachernai, where since the time of Leo I there were facilities for them to rest (the so-called *triklinia*).⁶⁸ But as the *Patria* texts are full of legendary features, it is not at all surprising that in the case of the *mone tes spoudes* they have attributed a story about the wife of Leo III (Maria) to his daughter who was called Anna. However inaccurate, what this tale implies is that, on occasion, empresses might decide to visit Blachernai, probably because of its very important church and relic, the girdle of the Virgin, which had been placed in a valuable reliquary there by Leo I and Verina, as noted earlier.⁶⁹ From other sources it is known that this relic was considered particularly efficacious for women in childbirth, a sort of holy epidural.⁷⁰ So in her heavily pregnant state, the empress might well have wished to invoke its powers (or even to borrow it for her own imminent delivery?). But “Anna” had miscalculated her dates, and the onset of her labor forced her to give birth in a private house.

If it was possible for an empress in such a state to undertake the fairly arduous three-mile journey from the Great Palace to Blachernai, which lay just within the city walls, this in itself is interesting and reflects a long-standing devotion to the Virgin’s great powers. The assumption of the obviously mythic story is that empresses did this sort of thing, and might find themselves in distant parts of the city

when labor pains began. And if any member of the imperial family had ever been caught out in this way, the event might have persuaded the emperor to find a method of preventing its repetition. This brings us to another unnoticed historical coincidence: Leo III was the grandfather of the first imperial prince “born in the purple,” *porphyrogennetos*. The famous epithet derives from the purple chamber in which empresses were delivered of their children from the mid-eighth century onward. The first imperial child to be so identified is Leo, born in 750 to Irene the Khazar, the first wife of Constantine V.⁷¹ The existence of the institution should also to be linked to the dynastic concerns of the Syrian family of Leo III, who took such pains to establish his family as one that would rule for many years.⁷² So what more natural than that Leo III and his son Constantine V should have established a special chamber, suitably lined with porphyry or hung with purple cloth, in which the empress would from now on give birth? No more accidents and imperial deliveries in the private homes of anonymous *protospatharioi*. Rather, a special room that could be adapted as a maternity ward, in which only the legitimate wife of the reigning emperor would retire to perform the labor of giving birth to the next heir to the throne. The empress’s primary task was thus brought under even tighter imperial control.

However fanciful, the story of the monastery of haste draws attention to the interaction of mundane and heavenly imperial powers. The cult of the *Theotokos* in Constantinople is clearly a ruling power, *basilissa dynamis*, a superior authority to heal and save. The secular/human and theological/divine aspects of this imperious feminine interconnect. Given the patriarchal assumptions of Byzantine society, male commentators who produce its written sources naturally reserve to men the exercise of all imperial power.⁷³ It is assumed that the power to rule should be restricted to the male sex, because of military responsibilities that require *andreia* (courage) and all the warlike virtues (though eunuchs can also be very good generals). The most recent and stimulating analysis of Byzantine succession has drawn attention to the two normal routes of becoming emperor: succeeding to the office of emperor, in a line that descends from the first kings recorded in the Bible, or succeeding one’s father, the previous ruler. Neither route is considered to be open to women.⁷⁴

Yet problems over succession in Byzantium create specific circumstances in which empresses may be called upon to perform a function beyond that of consort and mother. For example, if the heir apparent is still a child, a very young boy who cannot assume the office of emperor, imperial women have a clear role, one hallowed by tradition and respected by honorable precedent. Roman law assumes that the mother of a child is the natural person to defend its rights

until it reaches the age of maturity. Maternal authority is therefore a constant feature of the education and upbringing of orphaned children. The widowed mother is expected to play a notable role as the one person whose natural instinct is to protect the child's rights, to ensure that in the fullness of time when he gains his majority he will indeed become emperor. A similar stress on the mother defending the best interests of her child is found in all walks of life and through all periods of Byzantine history.⁷⁵

A number of empresses enhance their powers through guardianship over their sons after they suffer widowhood. While male chroniclers may display unease about the situation, they record it as the norm. Imperial mothers of minor sons are thus a constant of Byzantine history. In the mid-seventh century this is how the empress Martina justified her ambitions for her own son, over her stepson. The senate, however, refused to tolerate her claims and supported the position of Constans, grandson of Emperor Herakleios by his first wife. Martina and her son were therefore mutilated and exiled.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, a considerable number of empresses attained greater powers than they otherwise might have done by exercising their legitimate role as guardian, in defense of their sons' rights to rule. This was the scenario that permitted both Irene and Theodora in the eighth and ninth centuries to react energetically against the vested interests of court, church, and army to ensure that their sons both eventually became emperor. After that, their behavior differs. But there is no doubt that as mothers they were expected to protect their children's property, wealth, and expectations of supreme power.

THE FEMALE RULER

Finally, what if the empress declines to choose another consort after the emperor's death? Can she, with sufficient courage, manliness, and strength overcome her inherent, because feminine, weakness to take his place? Can she function as an honorary man if this is required? Here an immediate parallel can be drawn with male and female saints. Most sainted females have lesser qualities than their male counterparts, since they have to overcome the inheritance of Eve and the sin of the Garden of Eden in order to manifest true holiness. Many an early Christian saint's *Life* records the manifestation of *andreia*, that quintessentially male quality of courage, which makes it possible for a woman to behave as a man. Some resort to disguise and seek to pass as men or eunuchs rather than reveal their female nature.⁷⁷ In this transformation there are several key stages of "masculination," starting with cutting off their long hair, adopting

male dress, acting like a man and eventually being accepted as a eunuch, even to the extent of joining a male monastic community.

Two instances among others were well known in Byzantium, as well as in Western Christendom, and marked the possibility of women acting as men. The first comes from the *Vita* of Pelagia/Pelagius, whose story was translated into many tongues and finds a place in the *Golden Legend* of Jacopo da Voragine, the ultimate guarantee of popularity.⁷⁸ The most telling aspect of her life as a eunuch monk, renowned for holiness, who lived alone on the Mount of Olives, occurs after her death. When other monks came to lay out the body, they found the tell-tale evidence of her sex, and the story went around like wildfire that Pelagius was a she. As a result all the nuns from religious communities for miles around insisted on coming to the funeral, a public event, bearing candles and singing the dirges, mourning one of their own.⁷⁹ As Pelagia was laid to rest, her sisters claimed her as a model—a very holy woman who had deceived the whole world in her disguised existence as a penitent monk.

Records of such transvestism do not survive in Byzantium after the sixth century except for a few, arresting instances. Holy women were encouraged to live more normal roles, even as married women and mothers. Yet the attraction of “becoming male” in Christian terms remains. Lives of female saints who succeeded in avoiding arranged marriage by entering male monasteries disguised as eunuchs were much copied in medieval times, not only in Byzantium but also in the Christian West. In the tenth century Ælfric’s Anglo-Saxon translations of saints’ lives included the stories of Eufrasia and Eugenia, both Eastern transvestites, who chose to become monks in order to avoid detection by their families.⁸⁰ Through the copying, translation, reading, and hearing of these stories of women who defied their sex and became men, the notion was perpetuated that women could overcome their feminine characteristics. The idea of them living either as isolated desert “fathers” or as eunuchs in male religious communities appears to have had widespread appeal.⁸¹ Women who succeeded in setting aside what male authors perceived as a natural tendency to slip, to fall and to sin, were remembered and admired.

The second instance concerns Theodora, the former circus entertainer and one of the most maligned of all imperial brides, chosen by Justinian to share his throne. For Theodora, disguise as a man was out of the question since her power stemmed from her feminine qualities and seductive charms, which fascinated male observers. While Prokopios, the sole source for most of our information about her, condemns these powers, on another occasion he presents her as leading the resistance to threatened revolt, putting into her mouth a speech derived from Isokrates, with the glorious

message that it is better to die in the imperial purple than to flee in the face of rebellion,⁸² words later echoed at Tilbury: "I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king."⁸³

Thanks to skillful analysis, we now understand Prokopios's Janus-like attitude to Theodora much better.⁸⁴ Nonetheless, during the Nika riot in 532, he suggests that Theodora had to apologize for intervening in a male discourse in order to stiffen Justinian's resolve. Some modern commentators have built great theoretical edifices on this passage.⁸⁵ They claim that Theodora is here transgressing the established borders of her position as a woman, even if she is the most elevated of all women in the empire. She invades the male sphere of public discourse, coming out of the restricted corridors of female space, private, hidden, often limited to women, children, and eunuchs. No wonder she has to apologize before speaking in front of the inner circle of imperial advisers, the most trusted members of the "cabinet" of the sixth century AD.

Of course, we do not know how far the imperial couple shared or disputed power. Prokopios claims that they supported different factions in order to whip up disagreements between their supporters, to raise the tensions that they would later exploit to serve their own imperial purposes.⁸⁶ Justinian seems to have consulted Theodora on other matters, not merely what to do about the riot of 532. And Theodora seems to have had control of considerable space of her own where she acted independently, for she hid a Monophysite patriarch inside her private quarters for years. She also tortured and probably killed several individuals whom she accused of serious crimes, trumped-up charges no doubt, but she was able to impose an arbitrary judgment. Theodora used imperial powers to remove her enemies and to force her rivals into marriages she arranged. But nearly all the evidence concerning this particularly brilliant empress derives from the record of Prokopios, and it is he who attributes to her words of apology as she steps forward to save the day.⁸⁷

In 532 he states that she was present at this critical council of war and implies that she would have attended other cabinet meetings. There is no suggestion that Theodora was an outsider to the circles of supreme power, rather her insider status is confirmed by the success of her advice. The empress had access to this imperial space. Her manliness is acknowledged without any need for disguise. All that we know of this event is in the record of Prokopios. It may well be a fiction, contrived as a warning that even women say it is better to die in the purple than flee, and that there will be no female welcome for treason. What matters here is that Prokopios was a known source, that his account of Theodora was at the very least one of the myths

available within Byzantine ruling circles to validate female intervention, when this might prove necessary or useful. In addition, statues and portraits of this famous empress decorated the city.⁸⁸ Theodora's story, like that of Pelagia, was handed down—the possibility of women having manly virtue and the will to rule was recorded in what claimed to be trustworthy precedent. They drew attention to the political space that was available.

We have no reliable accounts as to what words the imperial couple exchanged in private or in public, not even an equivalent of *The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon*, but that famous medieval text illuminates one feature shared by both Oriental and Byzantine court society: the significance of court hierarchy, costumes and colors.⁸⁹ In particular, the existence of eunuchs creates a threefold set of gendered roles in medieval China and Byzantium, and breaks with the binary opposition between male and female, creating an additional in-between and go-between category. By establishing institutional roles for de-sexed men, ancient Oriental societies sought to avoid the emergence of a hereditary court hierarchy, as well as providing for the seclusion and protection of women. But in the medieval period eunuchs are found only in those societies with a developed courtly life and ritual.⁹⁰ They may be jailers as well as protectors of the emperor's womenfolk and children, but by collaborating with empresses eunuchs often support successful rule from “behind the curtain” (as can be seen in imperial China until 1918).⁹¹ In Byzantium many generations of empresses exploit the existence of eunuchs to try and achieve their ends. The noteworthy role of a third gender in sophisticated court society may possibly be paralleled at the court of Aachen, where, as Janet Nelson suggests, Charlemagne's unmarried daughters filled a role comparable to that of the eunuchs of the East (although they did not deprive themselves of sexual pleasures).⁹²

CONCLUSION

Whether they had the support of court eunuchs or not, the number of occasions when empresses appear to have taken initiatives beyond the call of the loyal wife imply a definite capacity to manipulate forces within and without the Great Palace in which they were housed. The imperial ideology inherited from Late Antiquity, with all its emphasis on precedent, tradition, and religious virtues, had not removed the possibility of female rule. There were no fixed regulations for the wives of emperors, beyond the established notion of conforming to tradition. Many empresses were able to adapt tradition to suit their own purposes. The imperial structures required empresses. Widowed

empresses, in particular, appeared in public doing things that may have been understood by some as contrary to the prevailing male norms—but they got away with such actions and speeches because they were empresses. Even as heads of households, women could exercise a certain power; this was an accepted facet of Byzantine society. As such, feminine authority is recorded in a textual neutrality, however much individual authors fear and condemn the women who wield it. And partly through the well-known stories of particularly courageous or outrageous women, the potential for female initiatives had been sown.

What these stories suggest is that when men behave in an insufficiently imperial style, or are just indecisive or weak, women can act in their place. This is not conceived as a permanent replacement, for feminine rule in turn tends to reinforce patriarchal tradition. But the importance to Byzantium of such a temporary replacement of male by female leadership makes it necessary to look beyond those male-authored texts, and later reinforcement by the Gibbons of our time, which describe such women as weak or wicked, subservient or Jezebels, evil-minded or just bad. Despite the semblance of a highly stratified, hierarchical, and conservative society, wives of emperors in Byzantium could draw on the three strands of resources elaborated earlier, some manifested in visual evidence of the imperial feminine in Byzantium. At no point did power and influence consolidate an established and fixed role for empresses. It could only add to the store of example and precedent on which later women might draw. Nothing altered the patriarchal order of Byzantine society that persisted to the end of the empire, and young princesses continue to be sacrificed to the needs of foreign policy, particularly in the last centuries, as the dreadful fate of little Simonis records.⁹³

Nonetheless, traditions attached to the ideas of the imperial feminine inspired and facilitated the exercise of power by many imperial women, both those born in the purple, such as Zoe and Theodora in the eleventh century, as well as foreign brides who married into the dynasties of Komnenos and Palaiologos in later periods. And in the eighth and ninth centuries Irene and Theodora proved able to reverse the reforming policy of the iconoclast dynasty of Leo III, exploiting circumstances to manipulate court tensions and divisions, and even to resist the policies of their husbands. The renewed strength of Byzantium, its defeat of the Arab threat to the Queen City itself, and the final restoration of icons, occur more or less at the same time. Drawing upon and strengthening the imperial feminine, women become co-architects of the triumph of religious images, as they argue the case using the essentially conservative and traditional instruments of survival: faith in the holy persons to save,

cure, heal, and protect. Through their determination, they help both to ensure the persistence of Byzantine religious art and the popular devotion to icons, as well as to perpetuate traditions of the feminine exercise of imperial power. In turn, it can be argued, this defining characteristic of the Eastern Empire assists in its survival for a further five hundred years.

NOTES

This text is closely based on my inaugural lecture delivered at King's College London on 23 March 1998. It has been much improved by the comments of Leslie Brubaker, Janet Nelson, and Chris Wickham. I also thank Anthony Barnett for his critical and constructive reading of many versions.

1. Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, rev. ed. J. B. Bury, 7 vols. (London, 1909–14), ch. 50 (v, 339–95).

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 30 (iv, 226–33, on Theodora); chs. 48 and 53 (v, 200–203, 295–96, Eirene); ch. 53 (v, 238, and vi, 111, Eudokia and Anna); and ch. 63 (vi, 517, 519–21, 523–27, Anne of Savoy).

3. In particular, Liz James has analyzed the presence of female rulers in images and questioned the general assumption that they were powerless: see her “Goddess, Whore, Wife or Slave? Will the Real Byzantine Empress Please Stand Up?,” in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe*, ed. Anne J. Duggan (Wood-bridge, 1997). **Update** See now her study, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium* (London, 2001); Lynda Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium, 527–1204* (London, 1999); Anne McClanan, *Representations of Early Byzantine Empresses: Image and Empire* (New York, 2002); Judith Herrin, *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium* (Princeton, 2002).

4. Judith Herrin, “Women and the Faith in Icons in Early Christianity,” [chapter 3](#) in this volume; Alexander Kazhdan and Alice-Mary Talbot, “Women and Icons,” *BZ* 85–86 (1991–92); Peter Hatlie, “Women of Discipline in the Second Iconoclast Age,” *BZ* 89 (1996).

5. For a critical appraisal, see Robin Cormack, “Women and Icons, and Women in Icons,” in *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (London, 1997), esp. 31–35, who misreads the argument as claiming that women created icon worship.

6. See my study, *Women in Purple*.

7. *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century: The Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, ed. Averil Cameron and Judith Herrin (Leiden, 1984; hereafter *Constantinople*), para. 11 (70–72).

8. *Ibid.*, paras. 16, 34, 43, 52, 58 (78, 94, 118–20, 126, 134); Leslie Brubaker, “Memories of Helena: Patterns of Imperial Female Matronage in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries,” in James, ed., *Women, Men and Eunuchs*.

9. *Constantinople*, paras. 29–37 (92–98); Albrecht Berger, *Untersuchungen zu den Patria Konstantinupoleos* (Bonn, 1988), 420, on Justinian II.

10. *Constantinople*, para. 37 (100.17).

11. Sozomen, VIII, 20; cf. Socrates, VI, 18; J.N.D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom—Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* (London, 1995), 238–40.

12. *Constantinople*, 206–7; Florent van Ommeslaeghe, “Jean Chrysostome en conflit avec l’impératrice Eudoxie: le dossier et les origines d’une légende,” *AB* 98

(1979); Kenneth G. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1982), 69–78; Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), 17–19; Kate Cooper, “Contesting the Nativity: Wives, Virgins and Pulcheria’s Imitatio Mariae,” *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies* 19 (1998), esp. 35. The eighth-century compilers of the *Parastaseis* note the connection with John’s downfall without going into any detail of Eudoxia’s role in it. They thus preserve a different rhetorical narrative from those analyzed by Kate Cooper. It has been suggested that the statue might not have survived the fire of 532 that destroyed the center of Constantinople during the Nika riot—see Berger, *Untersuchungen zu den Patria Konstantinupoleos*, 395–96—but the compilers of the *Parastaseis* were sure they knew about Eudoxia’s statues.

13. *Constantinople*, para. 31 (92.18–20).

14. *Ibid.*, paras 38, 40, 65, 80–1 (102.16–17, 110. 16–17, 146. 16–19, 158.15–16, 21–22) for problems of deciphering inscriptions experienced by the compilers.

15. Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London, 1985), esp. 18–37, 124–26.

16. Alexander Kazhdan et al., eds., *ODB*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1994), III, 2194–95; Norbert Franken, *Aequipondia: Figürliche Laufgewichte römischer und frühbyzantinischer Schnellwaagen* (Alfter, 1994), 15–16, 171–81. In Late Antiquity these weights tend to be more female than male, and busts rather than heads as in the Hellenistic period.

17. James, “Goddess, Whore, Wife or Slave?,” esp. 133, and pl. 10; Ludwig Wamser and Gisela Zahlhaas, eds., *Rom und Byzanz* (Munich, 1998), nos. 217 (Athena), 221, 224–26 (empresses), 218–19 (emperors). See also David Buckton, ed., *Byzantium: Treasures of Byzantine Art and Culture from British Collections* (London, 1994), nos. 109–10, a steelyard balance and a weight, representing the Emperor Phokas (602–10), both of the seventh century.

18. Archer St. Clair, “Imperial Virtue: Questions of Form and Function in the Case of Four Late Antique Statuettes,” *DOP* 51 (1996).

19. Kazhdan, *ODB*, III, 2194–95. But in fact the personification most commonly represented on weights is *Moneta*, holding cornucopias and scales: see Simon Bendell, *Byzantine Weights: An Introduction* (London, 1996), nos. 5, 7–12, 14; cf. no. 53, *Tyche* flanked by emperors (the only example).

20. Kathleen J. Shelton, *The Esquiline Treasure* (London, 1981), 69, 86–87, and pls. 35–37; Gudrun Bühl, *Constantinopolis und Roma: Stadtpersonifikationen der Spätantike* (Zurich, 1995), 107–42, with a fascinating reconstruction of the way these figurines may have been used on a consular *sella* (processional chair).

21. Anthony Cutler, “‘Rome’ and ‘Constantinople,’” in *Byzanz und der Westen*, ed. Irmgard Hutter (Vienna, 1984), sets out the theory that these are Carolingian copies of Late Antique originals, modified to represent Francia and Germania. See also Bühl, *Constantinopolis und Roma*, 185–87.

22. For example, in the Calendar of 354, produced in that year in Old Rome: see Michele Salzman, *On Roman Time: The Codex-Calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1990), fig. 4, and 27; Bühl, *Constantinopolis und Roma*, 80–106.

23. Salzman, *On Roman Time*, 27.

24. *Ibid.*; cf. Kathleen J. Shelton, “Imperial Tyches,” *Gesta* 18 (1979); Bühl, *Constantinopolis und Roma*, esp. 3–34.

25. Cutler, “‘Rome’ and ‘Constantinople,’” 61, n. 79.

26. Anthony Cutler, *The Aristocratic Psalters in Byzantium* (Paris, 1984).

27. Ioli Kalavresou, “Images of the Mother: When the Virgin Mary Became the Meter Theou,” *DOP* 44 (1990); Richard Lukas Freytag, *Die autonome Theotokosdarstellung der frühen Jahrhunderte*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1985); Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago, 1994), 30–

41, 47–65. **Update** Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park, PA, 2006).

28. Robin Cormack, *Painting the Soul: Icons, Death Masks and Shrouds* (London, 1997), 44–48, and pls. 6, 10.

29. Cooper, “Contesting the Nativity,” esp. 42, stressing the imperial impetus behind the formulation of the Virgin’s cult, which may underlie Pulcheria’s quarrel with Nestorios; cf. Vasiliki Limberis, *Divine Heiress: The Virgin Mary and the Creation of Christian Constantinople* (London, 1994), 53–61, 85–92; Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 141–74. **Update** Kate Cooper, “Empress and Theotokos: Gender and Patronage in the Christological Controversy,” in *The Church and Mary*, ed. R. N. Swanson (Oxford, 2004), 39–51, stressing the lack of agreement over empresses and the cult of the Virgin, as well as Sokrates, the church historian, as the most reliable source. In contrast, Liz James argues that Pulcheria dedicated herself and her sisters as “brides of Christ” and displayed as much devotion to Christ; further, the Hodegetria church does not appear in the sources until the ninth century; see “The Empress and the Virgin in Early Byzantium: Piety, Authority and Devotion,” in *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Aldershot, UK, 2005), 145–52. On the opportunities for wealthy Christian women, see Elizabeth A. Clark, “Patrons Not Priests: Gender and Power in Late Ancient Christianity,” *Gender and History* 2 (1990), 253–73.

30. Nicholas P. Constanas, “Weaving the Body of God: Proclus of Constantinople, the Theotokos and the Loom of the Flesh,” *JECS* 3 (1995).

31. Erwin Fenster, *Laudes Constantinopolitanae* (Munich, 1968), 100–104.

32. Christine Angelidi, *Pulcheria: la castità al potere* (Milan, 1996), esp. 73–86, 120–27; Limberis, *Divine Heiress*, 57–59; Cooper, “Contesting the Nativity.” There are many difficulties in defining the nature of the alleged garment, quaintly called the “cincture.” **Update** Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, as earlier, 11–35, on the importance of these relics of the Virgin, which predated any of her icons.

33. Mango, *Art*, 34–35; and on Verina’s significance in Byzantine memory, see James, “Goddess, Whore, Wife or Slave?,” 133–35.

34. Kurt Weitzmann, *The Monastery of S. Catherine at Mount Sinai*. I. *The Icons* (Princeton, 1976), 18–21, pls. IV–VI; cf. Leslie Brubaker, “Icons before Iconoclasm?,” in *Morphologie sociale e culturali in Europa fra tarda antichità et alto medioevo*, Settimane di Studio di Spoleto (1998), 45.

35. Carlo Cecchelli, *I Mosaici della Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore* (Turin, 1956), 203–19, and pls. 29, 49, xlix; Mary Stroll, “Maria Regina: Papal Symbol,” in Duggan, ed., *Queens and Queenship*; Ursula Nilgen, “Maria Regina—ein politischer Kultbildtypus?,” *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 19 (1981), esp. 6–7, 16–20.

36. The palimpsest wall at St. Maria Antiqua presents the Virgin in a totally imperial guise, as does the icon at Trastevere: Richard Krautheimer, *Rome: Profile of a City, 312–1308* (Princeton, 1980), 94–103; John Osborne, “Early Medieval Painting in San Clemente, Rome: The Madonna and Child in the Niche,” *Gesta* 20 (1981); Nilgen, “Maria Regina—ein politischer Kultbildtypus?,” 5–8; Stroll, “Maria Regina: Papal Symbol,” 176, and pl. 15. On the “revolutionary” character of the apse mosaic of Christ crowning the Virgin in Santa Maria in Trastevere put up for Pope Innocent II in 1140–80, see *ibid.*, 180–83, and pl. 19, a development that culminates in the *Maria Regina* mosaic in the apse of Santa Maria Maggiore of 1295, *ibid.*, 187–88, and pl. 26. **Update** Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, as earlier, points to the lack of an imperial *loros* on the Trastevere icon, and connects it with Rome’s break from Constantinople, 22–25.

37. John Lowden, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (London, 1997), 106–11, pls. 60, 62, 63. **Update** Galla Placidia was, however, buried in Rome.

38. On the Durazzo mosaics, see Maria Andaloro, “I Mosaici parietali di Durazzo

o dell'origine Costantinopolitana del tema iconografico di Maria Regina," *Studien zur spätantiken und byzantinischen Kunst: Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann gewidmet*, ed. Otto Feld and Urs Peschlow, 3 vols. (Bonn, 1986), iii, esp. pl. 36. As will be evident, I do not agree that the *Maria Regina* image originated in the East. I am most grateful to Alexei Lidov for discussion of the *Maria Regina* images. See also the Anglo-Saxon evidence cited in Pauline Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith* (Oxford, 1997), esp. 172–74.

39. See James, "Goddess, Whore, Wife or Slave?," 125, 130–31, and pl. 7.

40. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 126–32; Hans Belting, "Papal Artistic Commissions as Definitions of the Medieval Church in Rome," in *Light on the Eternal City*, ed. Hellmut Hager and Susan Scott Munshower (University Park, PA, 1987).

41. Belting, "Papal Artistic Commissions," 13–14.

42. Henry Maguire, "The Heavenly Court," in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, DC, 1997), esp. 257–58.

43. See the analysis by Leslie Brubaker of imperial women represented in Paris gr. 510, "Politics, Patronage and Art in Ninth Century Byzantium: The *Homilies* of Gregory of Nazianzus in Paris (B.N. gr. 510)," *DOP* 39 (1985); and the late ninth-century marble inlay portrait probably of Leo VI's third wife, discussed by Sharon Gerstel, "Saint Eudokia and the Imperial Household of Leo VI," *Art Bulletin* 79 (1997).

44. See for example the fresco from Cappadocia, illustrated in Anthony Cutler and Jean-Michel Spieser, *Byzance médiévale, 700–1204* (Paris, 1996), 109, pl. 80; Glenn Peers, "Patriarchal Politics in the Paris Gregory (B.N. gr. 510)," *JÖB* 47 (1997), also draws attention to the different people who may wear the imperial *loros*, with many fascinating observations; cf. Maguire, "Heavenly Court," 255–57.

45. Averil Cameron, "The Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople," *JTS*, new ser., 29 (1978); Limberis, *Divine Heiress*, ch. 6, and conclusion. Update Bissera Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, as earlier, 31–59, on the adaptation of the siege of 626 to serve new purposes in later centuries.

46. *The Homilies of Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople*, trans. Cyril Mango (Cambridge, MA, 1958), 286–96, esp. 290; Robin Cormack, "The Emperor at St. Sophia: Viewer and Viewed," in *Byzance et les images*, ed. André Guillou and Jannic Durand (Paris, 1994), esp. 237–39.

47. Joseph Ledit, *Marie dans la liturgie de Byzance* (Paris, 1976), 241–52; Antoine Wenger, *L'assomption de très Sainte Vierge dans la tradition byzantine du VI^e au X^e siècle* (Paris, 1955); Cooper, "Contesting the Nativity."

48. Cameron, "Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople," 82–85; Andaloro, "I Mosaici parietali di Durazzo," 109–12, where the *Maria Regina* image at Durazzo is traced to this and other Eastern texts rather than the Western examples cited earlier. While this argument has great force, it remains the case that no representations of the Virgin as empress survive from Byzantium.

49. *La Vie d'Etienne le Jeune par Etienne le Diacre*, ed. and trans. Marie-France Auzépy, Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs, 3 (Aldershot, UK, 1997), 92–93; Eng. trans. in Alice-Mary Talbot, *Byzantine Defenders of Images: Eight Saints' Lives in English Translation* (Washington, DC, 1998); Judith Herrin, "The Icon Corner in Medieval Byzantium," [chapter 13](#) in this volume.

50. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 208–9.

51. DC, i, ch. 92, 417–25.

52. See earlier, James, "Goddess, Whore, Wife or Slave?," 131, and pl. 8.

53. Gary Vikan, "Art and Marriage in Early Byzantium," *DOP* 44 (1990); Leslie Brubaker, "Courtly Projections: Coin Portraits of Byzantine Empresses from the Fourth to the Twelfth Century," paper given at the International Medieval Congress (Leeds, 1998).

54. Cormack, "Emperor at St. Sophia," 240–43; image from St. Sophia, cf. Lowden, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, pl. 212.

55. Leslie Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning in Ninth-Century Byzantium* (Cambridge, UK, 1999), 5–7, 162–63, and fig. 29.

56. *Chronicon Paschale*, ed. Immanuel Bekker (Bonn, 1822), 702; *Chronicon Paschale*, 284–628 AD, trans. Michael Whitby and Mary Whitby (Liverpool, 1989), 154; Gilbert Dagron, *Emperor et prêtre: études sur le "césaropapisme" byzantin* (Paris, 1996), 49, now translated as *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium* (Cambridge, UK, 2003).

57. Werner Ohnsorge, "Drei deperdita der byzantinischen Kaiserkanzlei und die Frankenadressen im Zeremonialbuch des Konstantinos Porphyrogennetos," *BZ* xlv (1952), esp. 325–26. At least Leo's daughter was a grown woman, rather than a child, but there is a contradictory element in the symbolic value attached to an Augusta.

58. For an opposing view, see Ioli Kalavresou-Maxeiner, "Eudokia Makrembolitissa and the Romanos Ivory," *DOP* 31 (1977), esp. 315–19.

59. Brubaker, "Courtly Projections"; imperial marriages are no longer commemorated on coins of the seventh and eighth century, but Martina (or Eudokia) briefly appears on the coinage of Herakleios: see A. R. Bellinger and Philip Grierson, *Catalogue of Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection*, 5 vols. (Washington, DC, 1966–99), II, 1, 69.

60. Indeed, the education and training of the next ruler is of crucial importance and must constitute the most important duty of any empress: see Judith Herrin, "L'éducation maternelle à Byzance," in *Femmes et pouvoirs des femmes à Byzance et en Occident VIe–XIe siècles*, ed. Stéphane Lebecqz et al. (Lille, 1999), now in an expanded version in English, "Unrivalled Influence: Mothers and Daughters in the Medieval Greek World," [chapter 4](#) in this volume.

61. On the "constitutional" position of the empress, see St. Mashev, "Die staatsrechtliche Stellung der byzantinischen Kaiserinnen," *BS* xxvii (1966); Elisabeth Bensammar, "La titulature de l'impératrice et sa signification," *B* xlvi (1976).

62. *Theophanes*, AM 6211, I, 400; C. Mango and R. Scott, 551–53; *DC*, ii, ch. 22 (619–20).

63. Again Pulcheria spent some time in her private palace in Hebdomon, away from court life, until she could find a way of removing the chief eunuch Chrysaphios: see Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 191–99.

64. A later example is provided by the Typikon of the Virgin Kecharitomenē drawn up by Irene, wife of John II Komnenos: see Paul Gautier, "Le Typikon de la Théotokos Kékaritōménē," *REB* 43 (1985), esp. 109 (on the feast of the *koimesis*) and 121 (on the commemoration of the founders' death days). **Update** See now the translation in *BMFC*.

65. *Scriptores Originum Constantinopolitanarum*, ed. Theodor Preger (Leipzig, 1901–7), fasc. 2, *Patria Konstantinoupoleos* III, para. 107, 251.

66. Gilbert Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire: études sur le recueil des "Patria"* (Paris, 1984), 317; Berger, *Untersuchungen zu den Patria Konstantinoupoleos*, 524–25. In these "patriographic" texts much effort is expended on etymological explanations for the names of particular monuments. Mostly they are quite unconvincing and reflect the authors' low level of knowledge both about the city's history and the derivation of Greek names.

67. *Scriptores Originum Constantinopolitanarum*, ed. Preger, fasc. 2, *Patria Konstantinoupoleos* III, para. 41, 232–33; also confirmed by Theophanes Continuatus, 174; Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, 316–17; Berger, *Untersuchungen zu den Patria Konstantinoupoleos*, 538. On Thekla's retirement, see Theophanes Continuatus, 147–48.

68. DC, i, ch. 27 (148 ff.); I am grateful to Georgia Maleviti for drawing my attention to this reference.

69. See earlier, 170, n. 33.

70. See *Zwei griechische Texte über die Vita der heiligen Theophano*, ed. Eduard Kurtz (St. Petersburg, 1898), 2.28–34, where in a difficult labor a mother borrows the relic.

71. Gilbert Dagron, “Nés dans la Pourpre,” *TM* 12 (1994). The citation occurs in a Neapolitan document dated 763. Constantine V also built the church of the Pharos: see J. Ebersolt, *Le Grand Palais de Constantinople* (Paris, 1910), 104. **Update** See also Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, as earlier, 28–29; Judith Herrin, “The Many Empresses of the Byzantine Court (and All Their Attendants),” [chapter 10](#) in this volume. Paul Magdalino, “L’église du Phare et les reliques de la Passion à Constantinople (VIIe/VIIIe–XIIe siècles),” in *Byzance et les reliques du Christ*, ed. J. Durand and B. Flusin (Paris, 2004), 15–30, stresses the uncertainty but admits that Constantine V could have been the founder, esp. 20–21. Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, ca. 680–850: A History* (Cambridge, UK, 2011), 216, agree that the Pharos church may have been built by Constantine V since Irene and Leo V (typo for IV) were betrothed there. Given the prejudice of surviving sources against these rulers, it is hardly surprising that no mention is made of the monument until its use for this important ceremony in 768.

72. Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre*, 169–95; Judith Herrin, “The Context of Iconoclast Reform,” in Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin eds., *Iconoclasm* (Birmingham, 1977), repr. as “The Historical Context of Iconoclast Reform,” [chapter 10](#) in *Margins and Metropolis: Authority across the Byzantine Empire*; Dionysia Missiou, “The Coins of the Period of the Iconomachy as an Expression of Political Ideology,” *Coinage and Religion: Ancient World, Byzantine World, Ovolos* 2 (1997), esp. 181.

73. See the curious analysis by Dean A. Miller, “Royauté et ambiguïté sexuelle,” *Annales ESC* 26 (1971); Dean A. Miller, “Byzantine Sovereignty and Female Potencies,” in *Women and Sovereignty*, ed. L. O. Fredenburg, *Cosmos* 7 (1992). **Update** See Dion C. Smythe, “Insiders and Outsiders,” in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. Liz. James (Oxford, 2010), 67–80, esp. 74–75, women as outsiders.

74. Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre*, ch. 1, esp. 70. While Zoe and Theodora inherited imperial authority from their father Constantine VIII in 1028, it was only after Zoe had raised four different men to the throne that her sister tried to rule on her own. That they were able to elevate so many to exercise supreme power in Byzantium reflects on their noble birth, but also on the failure of their father and uncle to marry them to suitable husbands at the proper age of around fifteen. See Barbara Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium, 1025–1204* (London, 1991), 42–58.

75. See Angeliki E. Laiou, *Marriage, amour et parenté à Byzance aux XIe–XIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1992), 148; and note 60 earlier.

76. *Theophanes*, AM 6133, I, 341; Mango and Scott, 474–75.

77. N. Delierneux, “Virilité physique et sainteté féminine dans l’hagiographie orientale du IVe au VIIe siècle,” *B* 67 (1997). **Update** See also Stavroula Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances: Reading the Body in Byzantine Passions and Lives of Holy Women* (Uppsala, 2005), 90–126, and further bibliography in “In Search of Byzantine Women: Three Avenues of Approach,” [chapter 2](#) in this volume, note 44.

78. *Pélagie la pénitente: métamorphoses d’une légende*, ed. Pierre Petitmengin, 2 vols. (Paris, 1981–84). Volume 1 includes the Greek, Georgian, Latin, Armenian, Syriac, Arab, and Slavonic versions; and volume 2 contains a lengthy analysis of their long survival in Western recensions, medieval French, Italian, Portuguese, English, German, Dutch, and a Norwegian saga.

79. See the Greek texts edited by Bernard Flusin, *ibid.*, I, 92–93 (paras. 49–51)

and introduction, 41–71; Ross Kraemer, *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, Monastics: A Sourcebook on Women's Religions in the Greco-Roman World* (Philadelphia, 1988), 316–24, esp. 324.

80. Pauline Stafford, “Queens, Nunneries and Reforming Churchmen: Gender, Religious Status and Reform in Tenth-and Eleventh-Century England,” *Past and Present* 163 (May 1999), esp. 9–12; Aelfric, *Lives of the Saints*, ed. W. W. Skeat, 2 vols. (Early Eng. Text Soc., old ser., 76; repr. London, 1966), I, 34, and II, 344, for the stories of Eugenia and Eufrasia, both Eastern saints of the early Christian period.

81. On the apparent ease of disguise as a eunuch, see earlier, note 77.

82. Prokopios, *History of the Wars*, xxiv, 33–37, ed. J. Haury, trans. H. B. Dewing, 5 vols. (London, 1914–28), I, 230–32; Averil Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (London, 1985), 69.

83. Queen Elizabeth I addressing the troops, 1588.

84. Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*, 67–83; Elizabeth Fisher, “Theodora and Antonina in the *Historia Arcana*: History or Fiction?,” *Arethusa* 11 (1978). **Update** Anthony Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea* (Philadelphia, 2004) concentrates on the tyrannical aspects of Justinian and Theodora’s rule and merely alludes to her “sordid background,” 78.

85. Charles Barber, “The Imperial Panel at San Vitale: A Reconsideration,” *BMGS* 14 (1990); James, “Goddess, Whore, Wife or Slave?,” 132–33, and pl. 9.

86. *The Anecdota (Secret History)*, x, 15–23, trans. H. B. Dewing (London, 1935), 126–28.

87. Prokopios, *History of the Wars*, xxiv, 32–37, ed. Haury, trans. Dewing, I, 230–32: the recommendation not to flee is prefaced by the following words: “a woman ought not to be daring among men or to assert herself boldly among those who are holding back from fear.” For her insistence on marrying people against their will, see *Anecdota*, xvii, 28–33, 43–45, trans. Dewing, 206–8, 210.

88. Prokopios preserves a glowing account of her statue at the Arkadianai: see *Buildings*, 1, xi, 8, ed. and trans. H. B. Dewing and G. Downey (Cambridge, MA, 1940), 88–90; *Constantinople*, para. 81, 158.

89. *The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon*, trans. and ed. Ivan Morris (Harmondsworth, 1971).

90. Kathryn Ringrose, “Living in the Shadows: Eunuchs and Gender in Byzantium,” in Gilbert Herdt, ed., *Third Sex, Third Gender* (New York, 1994); Kathryn Ringrose, “Eunuchs as Cultural Mediators,” *BF* xxiii (1996); Shaun Tougher, “Byzantine Eunuchs: An Overview, with Special Reference to Their Creation and Origin,” in Liz James, ed., *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium* (London, 1997) 168–94; on eunuchs in China, see R. H. van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China* (Leiden, 1961), 29–30, 87–88, 254–56. **Update** See also Judith Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire* (Princeton/London, 2008), 160–69.

91. See Marina Warner, *The Dragon Empress: The Life and Times of Tz'u-Hsi, 1835–1908, Empress Dowager of China* (London, 1972).

92. Janet L. Nelson, “La Famille de Charlemagne,” *B* 61 (1995), esp. 211.

93. Married before the legal age to Kral Milutin of Bulgaria, who was forty years her senior and raped her at the age of eight, she could never bear a child. After an utterly miserable life she was eventually widowed and permitted to return to Byzantium.

POLITICAL POWER AND CHRISTIAN FAITH IN BYZANTIUM

THE CASE OF IRENE (REGENT 780–90, EMPEROR 797–802)



Here's a figure who has divided most commentators: the girl from Athens, or somewhere nearby (at the time the region was rather insignificant), who was summoned to Constantinople to marry the prince and heir-elect, Leo the Khazar, who later ruled as Leo IV (775–80). From being a young bride she became a dominant mother who did not hesitate to have her own son blinded when he prevented her from exercising imperial power. This terrifying act, unparalleled in medieval sources, certainly gave her a very bad name.

It's clear that in Byzantium also historians found her an inexplicable figure, witness the twelfth-century inventions of George Kedrenos, who can only account for her by assuming that she was a devout icon venerator who could defy her future father-in-law, Constantine V. This seems to me a very unlikely scenario, not least because Constantine, the arch iconoclast, whose writings had helped to secure the drastic reform of the Byzantine church, had clearly arranged the marriage. But the historian may have drawn on other earlier interpretations that circulated and became embellished with the passing of centuries. In contrast, Theophanes, the chronicler who records his own recollection of Irene, was her contemporary, and while he has difficulty accounting for many events of the 770s, he accepts her exercise of power and praises her reversal of iconoclasm.

By investigating other features of Irene's career, including her patronage and building activity, I think it is possible to make sense of her life and to trace her development from young wife to dominant mother. In her use of iconoclast generals and possibly iconophile eunuchs, she drew on the skills of experienced military leaders and courtiers with administrative talent to sustain her authority. Whatever her religious convictions, she subordinated them and every other feeling to her determination to hold onto imperial power. This chapter originated in a report to the European Science Foundation research project on Gender and Religion.

WHILE IT IS UNUSUAL to find women exercising political power in medieval Europe, in Byzantium there was a stronger tradition that permitted wives, widows, and mothers to take a leading role. This is a gendered difference that requires analysis. The Christian Roman Empire in the East with its capital at Constantinople survived the sack of Rome in 410 and the fall of the West to barbarian control. It perpetuated imperial traditions until its fall to the Ottoman Turks in

1453. Byzantium was not a hereditary state, but fathers generally tried to arrange the succession for their kin. A son only a few months old might be acclaimed as co-emperor, an action designed to ensure that he would later inherit the position of emperor. Even if he had been recognized in this way, his father's premature death might prevent a direct accession to power. Ambitious generals often usurped control. But the death of an emperor also created an opportunity for his female relatives, for in such unsettled circumstances it was generally recognized that the young co-emperor's mother was most likely to keep his interests at heart and to protect his rights. Widowed mothers therefore were likely to participate in the regency council set up to administer the empire for the child, until he reached his majority.¹

This tradition had been established by examples dating from Late Antiquity, notably the power exercised by Pulcheria, older sister of Emperor Theodosios II in the fifth century.² It was reinforced by a strong belief that when an emperor had no sons, his daughters might carry particular claims in the transmission of power. In 491 the Senate of Constantinople invited Ariadne, daughter of one emperor and widow of another, to select the next ruler. She duly invited Anastasios to become her husband and by marrying him confirmed his legitimacy.³ The growth of dynastic concerns further strengthened the position of imperial women, which is clear from the stories of influence wielded by Theodora (wife of Justinian I) and Sophia (wife of Justin II) in the sixth century.⁴ When Herakleios died in 641, his second wife Martina attempted to establish her own power, by excluding the rights of the children of his first marriage. In this she was unsuccessful because Herakleios had stipulated that both families should share his inheritance and many factions at court and in the administration insisted on this.⁵ Nonetheless, by the eighth century the idea that a woman might hold power for her son if he was still a minor was accepted. Dynastic pressures and the stability of inheritance within an established ruling family had overruled the Roman tradition of election and acclamation by the Senate, army, and people.

In addition, the Byzantines believed that their emperor was chosen by God and divinely approved, so that even usurpers might establish their authority by coup d'état. The exercise of full imperial power by women was still an anomaly in a medieval state that remained heavily dependent on military success for its survival. This is one obvious reason why queens in the medieval West rarely attained power, since the fragmented states of the post-Roman world only maintained their authority by force of arms. Clearly, women in Byzantium could not lead armies and direct campaigns against the empire's many enemies.

However, some male rulers also refused a military role and entrusted the defense of the empire to better-qualified generals. Justinian I is a notable example of an emperor whose famous military leaders Belisarios and Narses defeated the Persians and reconquered large tracts of North Africa and Italy in the sixth century. So imperial women would naturally adopt the same attitude to the military aspect of imperial power. Could they also rule the empire in the traditional male fashion? In this respect women are often found to be excessively dependent on their courtiers and civil servants, in particular, on one type of courtier, namely the eunuch.⁶

Eunuchs had been a common feature of East Mediterranean society for centuries, serving as castrated priests, tutors, personal servants, and trusted intermediaries. Often they were of unfree origin, purchased from slave markets supplied from regions beyond the Roman Empire. Their inability to procreate was assumed to enhance their loyalty to their owners.⁷ In Byzantine society their prominence was ensured by a hierarchy of ranked positions at the court of Constantinople, mainly concerned with the personal care of the rulers. These posts reserved for “beardless men” recognized and supported the existence of a third category of gender, identified by their physical appearance and dress. Eunuchs also held other positions, notably in the church, and played an accepted role in Byzantium. Many took on military tasks, led armies, defeated enemies in single combat, manifesting typically “manly” qualities. Yet they formed part of a distinct group, neither male nor female, which perpetuated itself despite the lack of procreative power for many centuries.⁸ And it is from this constituency among the officials of the Great Palace in Constantinople that empresses are supposed to draw particular support.

The association of empresses with eunuchs is commonly made by modern historians, who assume that women could not manage without their eunuch servants and so permitted them a much more significant role than male emperors. The implication that eunuch courtiers had potential power is clearly correct. But that they could only exercise it when women were nominally in control is refuted by the example of Leo VI (886–912), whose period of rule permitted eunuchs great control. The more challenging issue is whether women could rule in Byzantium. To examine this I will concentrate on the period when Empress Irene was officially at the head of the imperial government, as regent for her young son from 780 to 790, and later as sole ruler. In the five years from 797–802 Irene ruled alone, an unprecedented event in the history of Byzantium.

It must be remembered that Irene was selected to marry Leo, the eldest son of Emperor Constantine V in 769, when both bride and groom were in their teens. Fifteen months later she gave birth to their son, named Constantine after his grandfather.⁹ In 780 Leo died, and Irene assumed a more prominent role as the empress-mother who formed the regency with the patriarch and other members of the administration. Unlike most women in her position, she refused to consider remarriage, which would have made her second husband emperor. For the next decade she appointed officials to lead the armies, to govern and tax the empire's regions, to run the civilian administration and conduct diplomatic relations with foreign powers. She appointed Tarasios, one of her leading civil servants, as patriarch of Constantinople, and patronized the building of new churches and monasteries. Irene managed all the different elements of imperial government for her underage son. In a move directed against the policies of the imperial dynasty of Leo III, she and Patriarch Tarasios summoned the Seventh Ecumenical Council, which eventually met at Nicaea in 787 and reversed the policy of iconoclasm.

This was clearly an unusual initiative. For two generations since 730 the Byzantine church had enforced the iconoclast policy of preventing idolatry by destroying icons and other representations of Christ, the Virgin, and saints. Constantine V had written theological tracts to justify this policy, stressing that the only true image of Christ is found in the eucharist. According to his thinking, paintings are handmade objects, merely paint and wood, and thus graven images, and worship of them is strictly prohibited by the second commandment. But his policy of iconoclasm isolated Constantinople: the churches of Rome and Jerusalem refused to support it and clung to their religious images. Constantine V also persecuted iconophile opponents within the empire, who challenged the policy and developed their own defense of icons. When her husband died, therefore, Irene inherited a divided church, which was not in communion with Rome and the Eastern patriarchates, and a vociferous group of monks, who were often painters of icons, arguing against iconoclasm.

While Irene is often assumed to have been an iconophile from birth, there is no evidence that she was raised in an icon-loving (iconophile) background. Nothing is known about her family, her upbringing, or her attachment to images. It seems very unlikely that she would have been chosen to marry the co-emperor if she had not supported the official iconoclasm.¹⁰ Another even more insidious assumption is that because Irene was a woman she would naturally have been an

iconophile. This argument is made on the basis of contemporary records all written by men, who emphasize the weakness and feeble-mindedness of women in general. There are, however, structural reasons why some women might have been attached to their icons: females had no official role in church and could only participate in the liturgy conducted by consecrated men. But icons could be hung in homes and put up on portable altars in private chapels, where women could venerate them without the intercession of male priests. This practice is well documented from the sources and suggests that some women were indeed devout iconophiles.¹¹ Others followed the official policy and removed their images.

Although Irene's position on icons is not entirely clear, she was not explicitly associated with her husband's attitude. In February 780 Leo IV is reported to have taken severe measures against some eunuchs of the palace who had smuggled in icons. The five officials were beaten and their heads shaved, and they were then forced to march in a humiliating public procession to the public prison, where one died. There is no evidence that Irene had any connection with their illegal veneration of icons inside the palace.¹² Nor did she have anything to do with this typical style of punishment. But she may have known the individuals involved. And it is interesting that these officials held high positions in the hierarchy reserved to eunuchs.

On the death of her husband Irene assumed control in the name of her young son Constantine, then nine years old. The existence of a distinct group of beardless imperial courtiers, trained to attend to the needs of the rulers, undoubtedly helped Irene to exercise power. For years she had been accustomed to their presence as masters of the empress's bedchamber, her wardrobe, her dining room, and her treasury. The familiar presence of this third gender, dedicated to specific court functions, gave Irene access to a range of skills, which she exploited carefully. The names of many of her eunuch servants are recorded in the sources, as they were sent to command armies, negotiate peace terms, or present diplomatic proposals to the Franks in Aachen or the Arabs in Damascus.¹³ One method of their recruitment may be illustrated by the career of Niketas: as a young boy he was castrated by his family in Paphlagonia and then sent to the capital, where he joined Irene's service during the regency. He later made a notable career.¹⁴

Irene also employed reliable generals, tax officials, churchmen, and ambassadors who were not eunuchs and had no connection with her private quarters at the Great Palace. Indeed, to maintain the vast bureaucracy that ran the empire, provided supplies for the army and navy, maintained roads, bridges, and castles, to mention only a few of the essential tasks, Irene needed all the trained personnel available.

She kept many military generals and civilian administrators from her husband's regime, and firmly put down the plots to unseat her and young Constantine in favor of other imperial candidates. Although rival claims to power persisted, Irene's regency appears to have been accepted. Part of the credit for the relatively peaceful decade of Constantine's minority must be due to her skillful deployment of trusted servants, both bearded and beardless.¹⁵

It is difficult to determine exactly how the decision to restore religious images was taken, but Irene must have played a significant part. After a signal failure in 786, when bishops loyal to iconoclasm prevented the universal council from carrying out its aim in capital, she reconvened the council one year later at Nicaea. After lengthy discussions, the 365 bishops and 132 monks present restored Christian images to their former place. Irene presided at the final session held in Constantinople, at which the emperors, Constantine and Irene, were hailed as a new Constantine and a new Helen. During this period everything was done in the names of the young ruler, yet on some public occasions the mother was acclaimed before the son.¹⁶

When the young emperor finally threw off his mother's tutelage and decided to rule alone (790–97), one of his first acts was to exile all her court eunuchs, while he imprisoned her in the palace of Eleutherios. So he understood that they had supported her authority and would not welcome his. Yet he, too, had his own eunuch courtiers, notably his tutor, John Pikridios, who assisted his bid for supreme power.¹⁷ This was, however, unsuccessful, and within a few years Constantine had lost support among the military through ill-judged campaigns, and outraged part of the ecclesiastical establishment by divorcing his wife, Maria, and forcing her into a convent. His mother was able to win over critical sections of the army so that when she moved against him there was no support for his legitimate rule. Irene ordered that he should be blinded, an act that disqualified him for the position of emperor, and assumed sole power. From 797 to 802 she ruled alone.¹⁸

IRENE AS EMPEROR

It was unheard of in Byzantium for a woman who had married into the ruling dynasty and was merely the widow of an emperor to issue coins with her own image on both sides, and laws in which she is identified as *pistos basileus* (faithful emperor). There is no evidence that Irene wished to be addressed as *basileus*, and her coins use the correct formula, *basilissa* (empress).¹⁹ Yet over a five-year period, longer than her husband Leo IV, she exercised supreme power, ruling

as if she was the sole emperor. During her reign she promoted several eunuchs to important positions: Niketas served as ambassador; Leo of Sinope was treasurer. Two more eunuchs played dominant roles: Stavrakios, whom she had appointed as general in 781/82 and made head of the administration, and Aetios, a court official who was exiled in 790 but returned with Irene in 797. These two hated each other and fought each other over the succession. As eunuchs neither could become emperor, but each continued to conspire, hoping to secure power. Their rivalry intensified when Irene fell ill and it was feared that she might die. She recovered, however, though she never recovered her control. After the death of Stavrakios, Aetios promoted his cousin Leo, trying to persuade Irene to designate him as the next emperor.

So does Irene's rule confirm the view that women could not succeed without the help of their eunuch courtiers? Did they manipulate her agreement to cover their ambitions?²⁰ In one very significant way Irene developed a policy that ran counter to her eunuch servants. She seems to have invited Charles, king of the Franks, who had been crowned emperor by Pope Leo III on Christmas Day 800, to secure his title by a formal marriage with her.²¹ This would have brought to an end the plans Aetios had for persuading Irene to adopt his cousin as her heir, and he certainly opposed the suggestion that she might marry Charlemagne. But the proposal was also unwelcome to other members of the court. The revolt against Irene, led by Nikephoros, the finance minister, may have taken shape against the news of Charlemagne's embassy in the winter of 801–2. The Franks were still in Constantinople when he ordered troops to surround Irene in her palace and send her into exile.

When her laws are examined, it is also clear that Irene had her own ideas.²² She issued two laws concerned with quite specific points: the first against people who swear false oaths, the second against those who marry for the third time. Since the church had canons to punish those who swore by the old gods or did not maintain their oaths,²³ as well as to restrict remarriage,²⁴ why was it necessary for Irene to issue imperial laws on these topics? The explanation lies in Irene's earliest experience of the Byzantine court under her father-in-law, Constantine V. She had suffered from his determination to allow no one but his eldest son, Leo IV, and his grandson Constantine, to inherit his imperial authority. Sections of the army and the civil administration had been forced to swear that they would accept no one else as their ruler.²⁵ As a result, when Irene became regent she exercised authority on behalf of her young son, Constantine. This of course had given her experience of government and a taste for power. When Constantine tried to assert his role as emperor in 790, he drew on the oath sworn

by the troops to his father, to accept no other authority, while Irene tried to impose an oath of loyalty to herself alone.²⁶ This tradition by which individual commanders and sections of the provincial forces (*themata*) were forced to swear fealty to one ruler rather than the other constituted a major block to Irene's ambition. In the northeast region of Asia Minor, the Armeniakon troops refused the oath to Irene, insisting on their loyalty to "Constantine and Irene as we have accepted in the beginning," that is, in the original order. It was this insistence that encouraged Constantine to move against his mother.

In his commentary on the events of 790 Theophanes the Confessor points out that in 775 all the commanders of the *themata* and the city *tagmata*, members of the Senate, citizens, and artisans had sworn to support only Constantine, the son of Leo IV, as their emperor. Then fifteen years later, during the contest for supreme power, some swore to Irene that they would never accept her son while she was alive. And then, as the tide turned, they acclaimed Constantine as sole emperor, making contrary oaths, which result inevitably in perjury, "and perjury is a denial of God."²⁷ This is echoed in the law against making false oaths: Irene stresses that every oath is made in God's presence and must therefore be most strictly maintained. Denial of such an oath is bound to bring down God's wrath. Those who swear in God's name and then deny their oaths will receive imperial punishment, though this is merely a foretaste of the divine punishment to come.²⁸

Her second law concerned third marriages. The church had legislated on this issue, declaring that second marriages were permissible if no children survived from the first, but pronouncing third marriages to be most undesirable.²⁹ So why did Irene take up this cause? The answer must be that she wished to denigrate her father-in-law, Constantine V, who had been married three times. She also intended to blacken the reputation of the children by his third marriage to Eudokia, because these sons (five of them) had threatened both Leo IV and Constantine. Indeed, they were still causing trouble for Irene in the 790s and continued to be a focus of attention even when blinded in 812.³⁰

Seen in this light, it seems to me likely that Irene issued both these imperial laws in order to reduce the influence of Constantine V especially among the military. Soldiers and generals who had fought under his command revered his memory as a great leader and trusted in his religious policy of iconoclasm. Under this banner they had won many battles against the Muslims; after his death they had suffered defeats. Irene had taken firm measures against iconoclasts and wished to reduce their achievements yet further. Yet the power of Constantine V's legacy was still in evidence in the early ninth century, after Irene's

death, and his reputation lived on to inspire later rulers.

These two laws proclaim Irene as emperor, for only the emperor can legislate. While this undoubtedly reflects her idea of legitimate power, the use of the masculine is probably a formal matter. Her legal advisers, led by Theoktistos, the *quaestor*, who were responsible for drafting laws, would not change the term *basileus*.³¹ So in this instance, Irene probably did not make a specific claim. She ruled as emperor, and issued laws and coins as the sole ruler in Byzantium, the position she had assumed. Within the empire she appears to have been accepted, although in Rome and the West some considered the imperial position empty (*vacans*). This theory was used to justify the coronation of Charlemagne as *imperator Romanorum*, emperor of the Romans, on Christmas Day 800, a title that was always disputed by Constantinople.

In choosing to legislate on these two issues, Irene revealed her enduring dislike of the dynasty into which she had married. Her opposition to Constantine V contributed to her reversal of his religious policy of iconoclasm. Both in her ecclesiastical and legal policies, she displayed an independent role born of her determination to distance herself from the ruling dynasty. In this policy she was aided not only by all those who had opposed iconoclasm for religious reasons: monks, devoted icon painters and venerators, ecclesiastics who refused to support the destruction of icons, and pious men and women who opposed it, but also by court eunuchs who accepted her ambitions and furthered their own. In contrast, her successor, Nikephoros, hardly promoted a single eunuch to a position of power.

CONCLUSION

Irene exploited the inherent power of eunuchs in court circles to secure imperial rulership. By winning the support of key figures—Stavrakios in the civilian, Aetios in the military—she was able to remove her son from his rightful position as emperor and rule alone for five years. But she negotiated with Charlemagne and issued two laws that reflect her power as the sole emperor. In making such legislation she exercised her own judgment and condemned the behavior of her predecessor, Constantine V, theologian of iconoclasm and a great military leader.

How was she able to act as a male emperor? Christian influence on marriage laws had given mothers greater powers as guardians for their underage children. At the highest level of society this meant that widowed empresses were expected to protect their son's inheritance. But to remove the son from his position by a mutilation, which

disqualified him from the imperial role, and to rule in his place—that is indeed a striking achievement. Irene was not born in the purple to an imperial couple, she was the daughter of a little-known family from central Greece. She married into the ruling dynasty and mastered its style to such effect that she could replace the legitimate emperor. By announcing that Constantine would no longer rule, she assured her own position as the sole emperor, drawing on that divine approval accorded to successful claimants.

The fact that she was accepted as *basileus* suggests that in Byzantium there was a greater appreciation of the imperial system of government and the role of the God-given ruler than existed in the medieval West. The individual who filled that post during his lifetime was nonetheless a temporary occupant of an eternal office. Since the Byzantines could not conceive of the end of their empire, they accepted a great variety of individuals as holders of the office of emperor: common soldiers such as Phokas, unknown peasants such as Basil I, disaffected generals such as Leo III, even a woman like Irene. Once established, they were all considered to have been chosen by God to provide a short period of leadership, after which another would be chosen. This can be illustrated by the speech attributed to Irene when she had been ousted by Nikephoros. Theophanes reported her as saying, “I consider God my helper and avenger who raised me when aforetime I had been left an orphan and elevated me, unworthy though I was, to the imperial throne. ... The manner of your elevation I also ascribe to the Lord, without whom, I am convinced, nothing can happen.”³² She continued that since Nikephoros had been appointed by Him, she would now do obeisance to him as to an emperor, and begged him to spare her weakness.

Whether Irene ever spoke these words, Theophanes here accurately reflects the ideological framework of imperial rule in Byzantium. Every emperor gained power only through divine sanction. Irene had been so blessed, and again Theophanes has a very particular description of her assumption of the regency: “the most pious Irene together with her son Constantine were miraculously entrusted by God with the Empire so that in this matter also God might be glorified through a widow and her orphan son.”³³ The chronicler also stresses the empress’s piety and her philanthropy, additional qualifications for an imperial leader. Whether Irene’s Christian commitment was unusual or quite normal is hard to judge. She certainly attended to the construction and restoration of churches, the foundation of monasteries, and the promotion of the see of Athens, possibly her hometown. But her devotion to icons is only made clear as she perceived the rift between the five chief churches of the pentarchy, and determined to replace it with Christian unity. This was achieved

at the Seventh Ecumenical Council, which is intimately linked with Irene and her son. Whatever the pressures behind her decision, together with her newly appointed patriarch, she was responsible for destroying the military opposition and promoting those forces favorable to religious images.

In this way, through the temporary tenure of political authority within a traditional imperial system of government, it was possible for a woman to become emperor in Byzantium. Despite all the prejudices against females as weak, feeble-minded, easily swayed, and so on, if one determined woman claimed supreme power, she might be able to rule as a man. Irene's example was not often followed, but it probably inspired several widowed empresses with underage sons, notably Theodora in the ninth century and Zoe Karbonopsina in the tenth.³⁴ Theodora also followed her model when she brought the second phase of iconoclasm to an end. It was much easier for princesses born in the purple (*porphyrogennitai*) to assert their rights as daughters of rulers, for instance, Zoe and Theodora, in the eleventh century. But the tradition of empress-mothers continued to allow powerful female regents, such as Anne of Savoy, a leading role in Byzantine politics long into the medieval period. The existence of a trained sector of castrated courtiers certainly assisted this process. But the structure of imperial rule, guaranteed by God and based in a hierarchical court, underlay and facilitated female claims to supreme control in Byzantium. Irene may be seen as a prominent exponent of this particular medieval system of government.

NOTES

1. Gilbert Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium* (Cambridge, UK, 2003); A. P. Kazhdan et al., *ODB*, sv. Emperor, cols. 692–93; “The Imperial Feminine in Byzantium,” [chapter 7](#) in this volume. **Update** See now Dimitar Angelov and Judith Herrin, “The Christian Imperial Tradition—Greek and Latin,” in *Universal Empire: A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History*, ed. Peter Fibiger Bang and Dariusz Kolodziejczyk (Cambridge, UK, 2012), 149–74.

2. Christine Angelidi, *Pulcheria: La Castità al Potere* (Milan, 1996); Liz James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium* (Leicester, 2001), 66–68. **Update** Doubt has been cast on the role of Pulcheria in promoting the cult of the Virgin Mother of God; see Liz James, “The Empress and the Virgin in Early Byzantium: Piety, Authority and Devotion,” in *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Aldershot, UK, 2005), 145–52; Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park, PA, 2006), esp. 15–16.

3. See “The Imperial Feminine in Byzantium,” [chapter 7](#) in this volume; James, *Empresses and Power*, 19–20, 64, 134–36.

4. Judith Herrin, *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium* (London, 2001), 4–5; James, *Empresses and Power*, 26–30, 39–41.

5. Judith Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom* (Oxford, 1987; repr. London, 2002), 215–16; Lynda Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium AD 527–1204* (London, 1999), 61–72.

6. See, for example, Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves: Sociological Studies in Roman History*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, UK, 1978), 172–96.

7. Shaun Tougher, ed., *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond* (London, 2002); Kathryn M. Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago, 2003), 8–11.

8. Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant*, 131–40, 163–83. **Update** See also Shaun Tougher, “Social Transformation, Gender Transformation? The Court Eunuch, 300–900,” in *Gender in the Early Medieval World, East and West, 300–900*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge, UK, 2004), 70–82.

9. Herrin, *Women in Purple*, 56–67. **Update** Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era ca. 680–850* (Cambridge, UK, 2011), 175 (associating the marriage with the ending of Constantine V’s pro-Western policy), 248.

10. Warren Treadgold cites the twelfth-century history of Kedrenos to explain this; see “An Indirectly Preserved Source for the Reign of Leo IV,” *JÖB* 34 (1984), 69–76; idem, *The Byzantine Revival 780–842* (Stanford, 1988), 5; cf. Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, 72, who assumes that Irene’s iconophile beliefs were conveniently overlooked.

11. Judith Herrin, “Women and the Faith in Icons in Early Christianity,” [chapter 3](#) in this volume.

12. *Theophanes*, I, 453. Again Kedrenos gives a different version that makes Irene party to the plot in line with his rewriting of her iconophile past; see Kedrenos, II, 19–20, and note 10 earlier. **Update** Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 249.

13. S. Tougher, “Byzantine Eunuchs: An Overview with Specific Reference to Their Origin and Creation,” in *Men, Women and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (London, 1995), 168–84; on Irene and her eunuchs, see Herrin, *Women in Purple*, 107–8, 110–13, 186–87; R.-J. Lilie, *Byzanz unter Eirene und Konstantin VI, 780–802* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1996), 142–44. In contrast, James, *Empresses and Power*, reduces the structural role of eunuchs, seeing Irene’s use of them as “a successful strategy for dealing with the problems presented by her sex,” 68, and mentioning only favorites such as Stavrakios, 87, 89. **Update** Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 253–56, stress the need for imperial elite troops in addition to thematic troops, and ignore her choice of eunuch commanders.

14. Herrin, *Women in Purple*, 186–87; he is the saint commemorated in D. Papachryssanthou, “La Vie du Patrice Nicétas, un confesseur du deuxième iconoclasme,” *TM* 3 (1986), 309–51.

15. Herrin, *Women in Purple*, 75–83, 87–92.

16. Ibid., 75–92. **Update** Marie-France Auzépy, “La place des moines à Nicée II (787),” *B* 58 (1988), 5–21, repr. in *L’histoire des iconoclastes* (Paris, 2007), with detailed analysis of the Council of 787; Brubaker and Haldon, 266–76; cf. 278–79 on the relatively minor role played by monks, who were not invited to the acclamations in Constantinople. E. Lamberz, *Die Bishofslisten des VII: Ökumenischen Konzils (Nicaenum II)*, Abhandlungen der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Klasse, Neue Folge, Heft 124 (Munich, 2004), 34 corrects the number of bishops to 343.

17. Herrin, *Women in Purple*, 94–95, 106–7. Constantine was supported by older men loyal to his grandfather Constantine V, such as the iconoclast Michael Lachanodrakon and the patricians Theodoros Kamoulianos, Damianos, and Peter the magistros, *Theophanes*, I, 464, 466. **Update** Brubaker and Haldon, 286–88.

18. Herrin, *Women in Purple*, 95–99; her sole rule, 113–17. **Update** Judith Herrin,

“Blinding in Byzantium,” in *Polypleuros Nous: Festschrift Peter Schreiner*, ed. Georgios Makris and Cordula Scholz (Munich, 2000), 56–68; Brubaker and Haldon, 290–94.

19. Herrin, *Women in Purple*, 100–101, pl. 1; for a full survey of empresses on coins, see James, *Empresses and Power*, 111–15, on the title *basilissa*, 125. **Update** Brubaker and Haldon, 352–55.

20. Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, 92, 94, stresses that Irene “felt it incumbent upon herself, for whatever reasons, to rely where possible on eunuchs”; “her eunuch officials whom she relied on even to fight military operations, and they proved to be treacherous and corrupt.” Similarly, Paul Magdalino implies that she was dependent on her minister Stavrakios; see “Paphlagonians in Byzantine High Society,” in *He byzantine Mikra Asia* (Athens, 1998), 141–50, esp. 149. In support of this view, they cite the evidence of Theophanes, who documents the rivalry between the two, I, 473–75. Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival*, 111, is more skeptical.

21. Herrin, *Women in Purple*, 117–18, 122–25.

22. Laws in L. Burgmann, “Die Novelle der Kaiserin Eirene,” *Fontes Minores* 4 (1981), 1–36; also in *JusGR*, I, 45–50.

23. See the strictures of the Council in Trullo on those who swear by the ancient gods; G. Nedungatt and J. Featherstone, *The Council in Trullo Revisited*, *Kanonika* 6 (Rome, 1995), c. 94, 173–74.

24. The canons against third and subsequent marriages are summarized in Nicolas Oikonomides, “Leo VI’s Legislation of 907 Forbidding Fourth Marriages, an Interpolation in the *Procheiros Nomos*,” *DOP* 30 (1976), 175–93.

25. *Theophanes*, I, 450; trans. Mango and Scott, 621.

26. *Theophanes*, I, 464–65.

27. *Ibid.*, 466, lines 17–18. The description of their perjury concludes with the report that the troops of Armeniakon swore that they would never accept Irene as emperor (*eis basilea*). Later they persisted in this refusal; *ibid.*, I, 467. **Update** Brubaker and Haldon, 287, 632–33.

28. Burgman, “Die Novelle der Kaisein Eirene,” 16–25.

29. Nicolas Oikonomides, as in note 24 earlier; Leo VI’s novel 90 ignores Irene’s, though it addresses the same problem of the legitimacy of third marriages. The emperor urges the correct observance of penance as set down in canon law and recognizes the legitimacy of offspring; P. Nouailles and A. Dain, *Les Nouvelles de Léon le Sage* (Paris, 1944), 296–98.

30. Herrin, *Women in Purple*, 113–14.

31. As the chief legal officer, *quaestor* (κυαίστωρ), Theoktistos drafted the laws. Later he took part in the plot to overthrow Irene, *Theophanes*, I, 476–79.

32. *Theophanes*, I, 478. Earlier the chronicler reveals his dislike of Nikephoros, when he writes, “Men who had lived a pious and reasonable life wondered at God’s judgement, namely how He had permitted a woman who had suffered like a martyr on behalf of the true faith to be ousted by a swineherd,” *ibid.*, I, 476; trans. Mango and Scott, 655.

33. *Theophanes*, I, 454; trans. Mango and Scott, 626. The term *paradoxos* has been translated “against all expectation,” which may accurately reflect the sense of surprise at Irene’s assumption of power; see Dionysia Misiou, “E Eirene kai to ‘paradoxos’ tou Theophane. Symbole sten syntagmatike these tes byzantines augoustas,” *Byzantina* 10 (1980), 169–78.

34. Herrin, *Women in Purple*, 238–39; Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, 114–25.

MOVING BONES

EVIDENCE OF POLITICAL BURIALS FROM MEDIEVAL CONSTANTINOPLE



In studying the evidence for the status of Byzantine empresses, their place of burial could be a critical factor. Although all emperors aimed to be buried within one of the two imperial mausolea (of Constantine I or Justinian I) attached to the church of the Holy Apostles, their final resting place was not guaranteed. Likewise, their wives might hope to be buried beside their husbands, especially if they had found a place within these high-prestige chambers. But rulers who were overthrown tended to end up in undistinguished graves, as for instance, Constantine VI and his mother Empress Irene. Yet by the tenth century the bones of the mother had been laid to rest beside her husband, and those of her son had been reunited with his first wife Maria and two daughters. These examples of the movement of tombs with their human remains owe much to the feminine determination that families should not be forgotten. In constructing shrines to their relations, women tried to ensure commemoration of the anniversaries of their deaths, marked by liturgies and distributions of money, clothing, and food to local people.

This practice was common throughout the medieval world and represented one initiative that women could take. To find it so clearly expressed in Byzantium between the eighth and the tenth centuries confirmed my view that in the Middle Ages women suffered similar forms of discrimination and often seized whatever opportunities they could to preserve the family name and the survival of a dynasty. It mirrored the official remembrance of past rulers, which took the emperor in power to the mausolea of Constantine and Justinian, where he lit candles, censed tombs, and said prayers for their souls. This instance of womanly influence was offered to Gilbert Dagron, whose seminal research on Byzantine Constantinople is a constant inspiration.

LIKE THE KINGS OF FRANCE who all wanted to be buried in Saint Denis, rulers of Byzantium had a specific burial place, which had been established by Constantine I—the imperial mausoleum later attached to the Church of the Holy Apostles.¹ Similar preoccupations are found in many cultures and civilizations, where perpetual commemoration may be manifested in buildings, from the original tomb of Mausolos to the Chinese ceramic army, from the Pantheon to Westminster Abbey. In Constantinople the eponymous founder of the city was the first to be laid to rest in the mausoleum he had constructed, which was probably finished by his son Constantius II. He had set up his

porphyry sarcophagus in the center of the building with twelve spaces for the Apostles or relics of the apostles beside himself. After 337 those of St. Andrew and St. Luke were acquired and deposited, thus giving force to the title *isapostolos*, equal of the apostles, to which Eusebius alludes in his description of the building.²

By the sixth century so many emperors had joined him there that Justinian constructed another mausoleum similarly attached to the church for his own burial, and his wife Theodora may have been the first to be interred there in 548. All rulers of the Imperial City, *basilissa polis*, however they gained power, hoped to find a resting place close to these great predecessors—though many died in battle, were assassinated, or were mutilated and imprisoned in a monastic exile. Similarly, their empresses and children anticipated burial in the same venue, and were only disappointed when their husbands, fathers, and brothers failed to make it.

Formal burial in this holiest of sites was of course preceded by a funeral procession from the Great Palace, if the emperor had died there, or from the place whence his body had been returned to Constantinople.³ And after the liturgy for the dead, the tomb would be visited by relatives on the third, ninth, and fortieth days after burial for the appropriate commemorations. Most significantly, all the imperial tombs were visited by the ruling emperor on numerous occasions during the year following established customs recorded in the *Book of Ceremonies*. Thus on Easter Monday, after the great festival of the *Anastasis*, the emperors ride out to the Holy Apostles and light candles and cense the tombs of their predecessors.⁴ They also visit the tombs on the death days of particular emperors, when gifts of coin (and occasionally food and/or clothing) are distributed to the poor. So the commemoration of past rulers of Byzantium formed a set routine in the life of the city, which was certainly known to those who stood to benefit (the general population).

A record compiled in the tenth century and attached to the *Book of Ceremonies* preserves an identification of some of these tombs in the two imperial mausolea.⁵ A slightly fuller Latin version is also preserved and was studied by Philip Grierson in 1962.⁶ From this document it is possible to find out which emperors and empresses ended up in the most desirable tombs in the capital. And, most helpfully, the same document records where some of the others were buried, occasionally in quite unfamiliar places. The survival of this information, when put together with other historical records, makes it clear that imperial bones were often moved around. The purpose of this paper is to trace some of their most surprising journeys.

My first example concerns the empress Irene, who is famous for having had her son Constantine VI blinded, in order to rule alone,

which she did from 797–802.⁷ As is well known she was overthrown in a palace coup d'état by her finance minister Nikephoros I, who banished her first to her own monastic foundation on Prinkipo and then to a more secure and harsh imprisonment on the island of Lesbos. Thanks to the discovery of a *Life* of the empress, her last wishes about her burial place are now known: she had asked to be buried in her own foundation, the monastic church of the Virgin on Prinkipo, and this was done.⁸

However, by the tenth century, her tomb is recorded in the *De Cerimoniis*, where she lay next to her husband, Emperor Leo IV, in the imperial mausoleum.⁹ The body had clearly been moved, but when? And by whom? The answer, I believe, is found in the record immediately preceding this in the same source, which relates the fate of Constantine V. This great ruler (741–75) was condemned by later sources as an arch heretic, not only because he sustained the policy of iconoclasm, but also because he contributed to its theological underpinning through his series of tracts (*Peuseis*). In 775 Constantine died of a wound sustained in battle and was buried beside his father Leo III in the imperial mausoleum. Despite the condemnation of iconoclasm thirteen years later, at the Seventh Ecumenical Council summoned by Irene in 787, Constantine remained among the honored imperial tombs.

And at a critical moment in the Bulgarian wars of the early ninth century, soldiers who cherished his memory staged a dramatic appeal for him to return and lead his troops to victory once more. Through some deceptive arrangement they made it appear that his sarcophagus was opening up and then called on him to arise and resume his highly successful military role.¹⁰ This event in 813 reflected his heroic stature and presaged the resumption of iconoclasm by Leo V. Using the fact that iconoclast rulers of the eighth century had been victorious in battle and had lived long lives, Leo justified his change of ecclesiastical policy—and hoped to revive the same traditions. Although he was overthrown after only seven years, his hero, Constantine V, continued to inspire iconoclast emperors: Theophilos named his first born son Constantine, instead of the expected Michael, after his father.¹¹

But after the second restoration of icons in 843, when the Isaurian rulers (that is, Leo III and Constantine V) were officially condemned as heretics by the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, a determined effort to prevent any further revival included the destruction of Constantine V's tomb in Holy Apostles.¹² This is recorded in the *Book of Ceremonies* and the *Chronicle of Symeon the Logothete*, as presented by Leo Grammatikos, who describes how his bones were burned, ground up, and scattered to the winds, and then his green sarcophagus was broken up and the

pieces later reused in iconophile church building.¹³ Thus all vestiges of the champion of eighth-century military triumphs were removed from the historical record in Constantinople.

The obliteration of his tomb left a space in the crowded mausoleum of Constantine. And in connection with the reversal of iconoclasm, it seems to me highly likely that Empress Theodora proceeded to install the tomb of her predecessor Irene, who had taken the first dramatic step in 787 to restore the holy icons to their revered place in the church.¹⁴ Irene served as a model to Theodora; indeed, they were connected through a complex web of iconophile practice, which preserved the habits of icon veneration during periods of persecution.¹⁵ So it is obvious that Theodora might well have wanted to ensure the commemoration of Irene in the Church of the Holy Apostles, rather than in the nunnery she had founded on Prinkipo. By bringing the relics from their first resting place, Theodora ensured that the previous iconophile hero's white sarcophagus was placed next to that of her husband in its rightful place. In the imperial mausoleum Irene's memory would be cherished by regular visits, liturgies and demonstrations of piety, as the *De Cerimoniis* records.

The second case study concerns the fate of Irene's son, Constantine VI. Through complex circumstances, he provoked such opposition in ecclesiastical circles and among the military that when his mother plotted to remove him from power, few stood by him. In one of the grisliest moments of Byzantine history, Irene ordered his arrest and blinding in 797.¹⁶ And the chief chronicler of the time claims that this was done in a way intended to cause his death. But he lived on, despite the blinding, in a private residence in the capital, cared for by his second wife, Theodote. And after his death from natural causes, she in turn buried his body in the monastery she founded in this villa.¹⁷ There is some dispute about this because in the Latin version of the list of imperial burials, Constantine VI is said to be buried on Prinkipo, in the same monastery founded by his mother.¹⁸ This confusion seems to assume a connection between Irene and her son even in death, but is more likely to be an error. The authoritative text records that his body ended up in a quite different monastery, that of the lady Euphrosyne.¹⁹

To resolve this puzzle, again it is necessary to recall the background of Constantine's life. His first marriage was to Maria of Amnia, a young beauty chosen, according to her cousin Niketas, in a complex bride show.²⁰ The prince had no say in the matter and is alleged to have disliked his wife. Maria bore him two daughters, Irene and Euphrosyne, and it may have been the birth of the second female child that gave Constantine a pretext for divorcing her. But by his insistence on forcing Maria to be tonsured and admitted to a nunnery, and then

choosing a second wife, Theodote, the emperor generated intense hostility from the strict monastic party within the church. Under the leadership of Platon of Sakkoudion and his nephews Theodore and Joseph, the opposition pointed out that this was completely against church law: every nun and monk had to choose the celibate life freely. They also claimed that Constantine had no grounds for divorcing his wife, whom he accused of trying to poison him, and that therefore his second marriage was adulterous. The issue provoked such dispute in Byzantium that it created a schism, aptly called the adultery (Moechian) schism.

While those who interpreted canon law more strictly continued to condemn the emperor, Maria and her two young daughters were confined in a sort of imprisonment in the feminine monastery on Prinkipo founded by Irene. Euphrosyne shared her mother's disgrace and spent all her early life there. After twenty-five years or more, however, in the 820s, she received a proposal of marriage from Emperor Michael II, a military general who had usurped the throne and assassinated his predecessor Leo V. Although such movement was against all the monastic rules, Euphrosyne may not have been a regular nun. In any event, she left Prinkipo, married the emperor and in her new role as empress, she established a monastery known by her name, the *mone tes kyras Euphrosynes*.²¹ This type of patronage, which created a shrine in which she prepared her own tomb, was quite familiar not only in Byzantium but also in the medieval West. Elite women often took steps to ensure that they would be buried in appropriate places, buying a resting place in a monastery, or founding a new institution for the purpose.²² So Euphrosyne's concern fits a pattern. But what she proceeded to do is quite exceptional.

For she then brought together, to this shrine, the bodies of her mother and her father, her sister, and a younger relative, so that in death her parents would be reunited, the divorce that had blighted her life would be undone, and she would be remembered as the person who had set up a family shrine to the last generation of the dynasty founded by Leo III.²³ Her sister Irene had probably died on Prinkipo and been buried in the monastic church. But her mother may have accompanied her out of the monastery when she married. Her father's remains were removed from the monastery of Theodote. Through her plans for their post-mortem family unity, Euphrosyne ensured that her parents would not be separated, that their marriage would remain valid, and that their two legitimate daughters would never be forgotten. It is a measure typical of the concern expressed by aristocratic women to preserve the memory of past generations, and to secure their commemoration in annual liturgies and masses for the souls of the departed, when charitable distributions to the poor, free

food and drink, and other distinct forms of philanthropy would recall the fame of the family.²⁴

My third case concerns the empress Theodora, allegedly winner of another beauty contest or bride show, who was married to Theophilos (829–42), another arch iconoclast. Fourteen months after his death Theodora secured the reversal of his policy on icons; like Irene before her she restored the holy images, and she established a new liturgy to mark their commemoration that survives to this day. It is the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, read every year on the first Sunday in Lent. As already mentioned, Theodora also destroyed the tomb of Constantine V, now condemned as the leading heretic of the iconoclast movement, and possibly replaced it with the sarcophagus of Irene, the iconophile hero.

But in her own life, Theodora was less fortunate. She ruled the empire for her young son Michael until he was old enough to assume power in 856, and for this skillful care he punished her with exile from the imperial court to a monastic confinement. Michael III then promoted an unknown wrestler and horse-trainer, by the name of Basil, to be his groom, his personal attendant, and eventually to rule with him as co-emperor. I think we may assume that Theodora watched all this with horror; she certainly mistrusted Basil's influence over her son.²⁵ She did not omit to make plans for her own burial, however, perhaps because she doubted Michael's determination to have her laid to rest in the imperial mausoleum beside her husband Theophilos. So she took over the patronage of a monastery known as *ta Gastria*, where she spent much of her exile with her four daughters, and where she interred her mother, Theoktiste.²⁶ Like Euphrosyne she suspected that her own family was not going to be remembered with due honor, and she took steps to prevent this.

After her mother, Theodora's brother Bardas took his place in the monastery church—he had been assassinated in 886 and his body was horribly mutilated. Someone must have been responsible for collecting his jawbone and bringing it to *ta Gastria*, where his tomb is recorded in the *De Cerimoniis*. Despite their disagreements, after his death she did not want to neglect his memory but included him among her relatives in the shrine. In this way she proceeded with the systematic creation of a site in which the family would be commemorated, and where she would eventually be laid to rest. In the tenth century the disposition of the family members at the Gastria monastery is recorded as follows:

On the right side looking towards the East, the blessed Theodora, wife of Theophilos, and her three daughters. Opposite in a stone larnax, Petronas who was *domestikos* of the *scholai* and brother of the blessed empress Theodora. And in the narthex of the same church, Theoktiste [her mother], and nearby Irene, daughter of

Theodora realized that the family into which she had married and had done so much to support had been effectively replaced by Basil the Macedonian. She feared the disrepute into which her relatives might fall. So she took steps to guarantee the annual commemoration of herself and her family. And since she would later be acclaimed as a saint, for her role in the restoration of images, she succeeded in preserving the whole family's status.

In turn, the relics of Michael III also had a checkered career. After his murder at the hands of Basil, who thus became sole emperor, his mother and sisters assisted in a modest, impromptu burial in a monastery on the Asian shore of the Bosphorus.²⁸ There his bones remained, until Basil died in 886. His son and successor, Leo VI, immediately ordered their return to the imperial mausoleum, and thus the remains of Michael III joined those of his co-emperor Basil.²⁹ As there was no need to move them from their insignificant monastic grave, it is hard to make sense of Leo's unexpected decision. But this probably turns on one poorly documented aspect of Michael's life. For it appears that Leo may have known, despite public declarations to the contrary, that this same Michael was actually his father. Yes, he was called the son of Basil, and yes, he acceded to imperial power through that imperial descent. But sources close to the court at the time of his birth recorded that his father was Michael III, who sustained a prolonged relationship with Leo's mother, Eudokia, even after she was married to Basil. In any event, the result of this moving of Michael III's bones to their final location in the imperial burial chamber is noted in official sources.

Basil himself had paid great attention to his final resting place. Instead of the mausoleum of Justinian, where the iconoclast rulers were all interred, Basil reopened the earlier imperial burial place. This move was clearly designed to assert the association of the new Macedonian dynasty with that of Constantine, the founder of the city.³⁰ It may have occurred in 879, when his eldest son and co-emperor Constantine died, or before 886 in preparation for Basil's own burial. But even the highly successful Basil the Macedonian was unable to prevent the rehabilitation of his predecessor and patron. He could not undo the filial piety felt by his so-called son Leo the Wise. Michael III was duly returned to the Holy Apostles and received the same cult as his ancestors.

Subsequent dynasties adopted different policies: Romanos I Lekapenos built himself a distinct mausoleum, the Myrelaion, now Bodrum Camii. In 922 he interred his wife Theodora there, and joined her after his death in 945.³¹ While it seems natural for his sons,

however disloyal they had been in his lifetime, to be buried there, for his daughter Helena, who had married Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, this may have been a political decision. Like so many imperial women, Helena lived on longer than her husband and may have been resented by her son Romanos II, who preferred to keep her out of the established mausolea.³² By the twelfth century John II Komnenos founded the Pantokrator monastery and chose to be buried there. In thus inaugurating a shrine devoted to his family, he handed on a model for later rulers.³³ These new separate mausolea coexisted with those at the Holy Apostles, generating new centers of imperial philanthropy connected with individual families, and permitted these dynasties to be recalled and celebrated every year.

But during the eighth and ninth centuries, the movement of bones and their reburial in more appropriate surroundings assumes an established pattern, which may owe something to the *translationes* of saintly relics. It is particularly the work of imperial women, princesses and widows, who seek to ensure the survival and commemoration of their families for all time. Especially when they were anxious about post-mortem neglect, even oblivion, they insisted on setting up shrines in which monastic communities would be bound by legacies and endowments to recall the death of each member, marked by suitable charitable distributions and public liturgies. Euphrosyne and Theodora clearly adopted this procedure in order to counteract the prevailing political climate. Their moving of bones has a specific political aim and constitutes one method by which imperial women could take initiatives, even against the judgment of their male relatives. In this way they demonstrate a firm sense of responsibility for the dynasty, which becomes a highly effective form of remembrance in perpetuity.

NOTES

1. G. Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre: Étude sur le "césaropapisme" byzantin* (Paris, 1996), 151–54; now available in Eng. trans., *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium* (Cambridge, UK, 2003).

2. Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre*, n. 1, 159; Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* IV, 58–60, 70–73.

3. P. Karlin-Hayter, "L'adieu à l'empereur," *B* 61 (1991), 112–55.

4. DC, 71–86. Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre*, n. 1, 213, draws attention to the priestly function of censoring the tombs, which is required of emperors on particular occasions such as this.

5. DC, II, 42, 642–49.

6. P. Grierson, "The Tombs and Obits of the Byzantine Emperors," *DOP* 16 (1962), 1–63.

7. See most recently my study, *Women in Purple*, 100–129.

8. W. Treadgold, "An Unpublished Saint's Life of the Empress Irene (BHG

2205)," *BF* 8 (1982), 236–51.

9. *DC*, II, 42, 645.

10. *Scriptor Incertus de Leone Armenio*, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn, 1842), 346; *Theopanes*, AM 6305, I, 501; trans. Mango and Scott, 684–85. **Update** Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, ca. 680–850: A History* (Cambridge, UK, 2011), 659, point out that those responsible were punished for breaking into the imperial tomb and claiming a false miracle, not for their iconoclast views.

11. Known only from coins issued in the names of Theophilos and his son, and from the burial space occupied by Constantine in the Holy Apostles, *DC*, II, 42, 645. He fell into a cistern inside the palace and was drowned in ca. 835.

12. Condemnation of the Isaurians; see J. Gouillard, "Le Synodikon de l'Orthodoxie," *TM*, 2 (1967), 1–316, esp. 56–57.

13. *DC*, II, 42, 645; cf. Leon Grammatikos, *Chronographia*, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn, 1842), 248–49, where the initiative is attributed to Michael III. **Update** Cf. Brubaker and Haldon, as earlier, 450, n. 335, where Michael II (a typo for III) is made responsible for the event, dated to 866, after Theodora's exile from the palace. Since the date of John's death is not clearly established, the event may well have occurred earlier; see R.-J. Lilie, *Die Patriarchen der ikonoklastischen Zeit: Germanos I—Methodios I (715–847)* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1999), 169–82, esp. 178. Despite the account in Leo Grammatikos, if Irene's bones were not moved by Theodora, who undertook this *translatio*?

14. Grierson, "Tombs and Obits," note 6 earlier, 34.

15. Herrin, *Women in Purple*, note 7 earlier, 213–14.

16. *Theopanes*, AM 6189, I, 472.

17. Symeon Magister, *Chronicle*, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn, 1842), 645–46, reproduces a fanciful history of a hostel (*xenon*) founded by Theophilos, which had served many different functions in the past. After 797 it was used as the residence of Constantine VI and his wife. After his death, she (Theodote) converted it to a monastery, which was called *Metanoia* (repentance). The nuns later appealed to the emperor (Theophilos) to move them, which he did, and then he refounded the institution as a hostel. The *Patria Konstantinoupoleos* II, 65, ed. T. Preger (Leipzig, 1901–7; repr. New York, 1975), 185–87 (hereafter *Patria*), confirm Theophilos's activity in founding the *xenon*, and produce even more elaborate reasons for its past association with adultery, which turn on a statue of Aphrodite. But there is no mention of Theodote and Constantine using it as their home after his blinding and retirement from court; cf. the Anonymous, ed. K. Sathas, *Mesaionike Bibliothekē*, VII, 136. While most of this information is legendary, it suggests that Theodote lived on after the death of her husband in ca. 806.

18. Grierson, "Tombs and Obits," note 6 earlier, 54.

19. *DC*, II, 42, 647.

20. For the most recent analysis of this alleged Byzantine custom, see M. Vinson, "The Life of Theodora and the Rhetoric of the Byzantine Bride Show," *JÖB* 49 (1999), 31–60; and for Maria's in particular, Herrin, *Women in Purple*, note 7 earlier, 130–38, and cf. L. Rydén, *The Life of St. Philaretos the Merciful Written by His Grandson Niketas: A Critical Edition with Introduction, Translation, Notes and Indices* (Uppsala, 2002), 38–39.

21. *DC*, II, 42, 647; Theophanes Continuatus, 86, 90; cf. *Patria* III, 77, 243, where the monastery of Kyra Euphrosyne is associated with a fictive sister of Michael III. See also M.-F. Auzépy, "De Philarète, de sa famille et de certains monastères de Constantinople," in *Les saints et leur sanctuaire à Byzance: texts, images et monuments*, ed. C. Jolivet-Lévi, M. Kaplan, and J.-P. Sodini (Paris, 1994), 113–32, repr. in Marie-France Auzépy, *L'histoire des iconoclastes* (Paris, 2007), 179–98.

22. P. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance* (Princeton 1994), 48–80, cf. E. Van

Houts, *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe 900–1200* (London, 1999), 65–92.

23. DC, II, 42, 647.

24. In addition to note 22 earlier, Theodote, the second wife of Constantine VI, provides an example, as does Prokopia, the wife of Michael I, *Patria* III, 153, 264–65.

25. According to Theophanes Continuatus, 233, Theophilos himself had foreseen the disaster that Basil would bring to the dynasty.

26. Theophanes Continuatus, 90, confirms that Theoktiste was buried at *ta Gastria*; in contrast, the *Patria*, III, 4, records only that the monastery was founded by Helena, Constantine's mother.

27. DC, II, 42, 647–648.

28. Leon Grammatikos, 251–52, records that Paulos the *koitonites* was sent to bury Michael and found Theodora and her daughters weeping over his body. It was wrapped in a carpet and then transferred by boat to the monastery of Chrysopolis, where it was buried without further ceremony.

29. Theophanes Continuatus, 353; Leon Grammatikos, 262–63. DC, II, 42, 642; Grierson, "Tombs and Obits," note 6 earlier, 27, 45–46, 57.

30. Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre*, note 1 earlier, 212–13.

31. Theophanes Continuatus, 402, 441; see the recent discussion by A. E. Müller, "Wiederverwendete Sarkophage?," *JÖB* 48 (1998), 49–56.

32. Theophanes Continuatus, 473, although the chronicler emphasizes that she was buried with full imperial honors. **Update** On Helena's difficulties, see "The Many Empresses of the Byzantine Court (and All Their Attendants)," [chapter 10](#) in this volume. The most striking departure from tradition was made by Basil II when he chose to be buried at the church of St. John the Evangelist at the Hebdomon, the military parade ground in the southwest suburb of the city. And as Titos Papamastorakis shows, Basil's example was followed by later eleventh-century rulers including Zoe; see "The Empress Zoe's Tomb," *The Empire in Crisis (?): Byzantium in the Eleventh Century*, ed. Vassiliki Vlyssidou (Athens, 2003), 497–511.

33. "Typikon of Emperor John II Komnenos for the Monastery of Christ Pantokrator in Constantinople," trans. R. Jordan, in *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, ed. J. P. Thomas and A. C. Hero (Washington, DC, 2000), vol. II, 725–81; also available online at http://www.doaks.org/publications/doaks_online_publications/typ000.html.

THE MANY EMPRESSES OF THE BYZANTINE COURT (AND ALL THEIR ATTENDANTS)



Within the hierarchy of the imperial court, the emperor and an empress had to perform certain roles with the male and female courtiers and distinguished visitors. Normally, the empire required one male ruler to be in charge, and it is generally assumed that his wife would fill the position of empress. But many individuals might bear the titles of *basileus* and *basilissa*. The heir apparent was regularly crowned as co-emperor in his father's lifetime; even very young boys might be elevated in this way in an effort to secure the succession for the family. In similar fashion, if the emperor's wife died or became incapable, a female child might hold the title of empress, and preside over the female section of the court. Although such juvenile promotions were intended to strengthen the hold of the dynasty on imperial power, they occasionally led to revolts that established another family within the Great Palace. Rival emperors and empresses might coexist, particularly after the death of one ruler and before the acclamation or coronation of the next.

An invitation from Elisabeth Malamut to participate in a Journée devoted to imperial female figures prompted me to look more closely at these moments when the Byzantine court appeared to contain many empresses. With the much appreciated help of Guillaume Saint-Guillain, this chapter was published in French, and is included here somewhat expanded in English.

IN THE POLITICAL IDEOLOGY of the Byzantine Empire, there was place for only one ruler, the emperor “crowned by God” and blessed by the church, who united all his subjects within the known world, *oikoumene*. The notion of one state, one faith, and one emperor predominated, paralleled by only one court, the imperial court at Constantinople. Although aristocratic families might maintain palaces both in the provinces and in the capital, there was nothing to rival the Great Palace on the acropolis of the capital. And while many conflicts and civil wars were fought over the succession, once an emperor had been crowned in Constantinople his authority was greatly enhanced over the imperial court as well as his uncrowned rivals. The eleventh-century general Kekaumenos advised his sons always to support “the emperor who is in Constantinople,” because control of the capital was such a great advantage.¹ Since there should in theory be only one emperor, naturally there would normally be only one empress, his

wife. So we are used to thinking about the empress in the singular. In this chapter, however, I would like to invite you to make a fundamental change. Let us consider empresses plural, for the Byzantine court frequently contained more than one.

Many circumstances could give rise to such a plurality. At the death of any emperor, his widow often clung to the title *basilissa* and its prestige while the new ruler asserted his wife's right to it. Some emperors had elevated their sisters or daughters to the position, and such ex-empresses frequently caused problems. The empress-mother and her daughter or daughter-in-law might both have the right to use the title, and relations between them were not always good. On other occasions the emperor might insist on raising his mistress to the imperial rank, even while his wife, the empress, was officially in charge of the women's quarters of the Great Palace and the imperial court. In this way, several women might hold the official imperial designation of empress, and others might simultaneously aspire to the title.

Nevertheless, as the structures of imperial court life evolved, two factors materialized into greater significance: the presence of an empress, usually the emperor's wife, became essential to court rituals; and an empress had to take charge of the female sector of the court.² When two women were elevated to the same position of empress, it was necessary for one to be designated as the official holder of the title. This could provoke immense rivalry, as Theodosius II found in the early fifth century. In order to fulfill the first factor of court life, in 414 he crowned his older sister Pulcheria empress (*augusta* [*augouste*]), and even at the age of fifteen she took initiatives to organize the court. With patriarchal support she tried to establish a more devout Christian atmosphere, and when Theodosius was of an age to marry, she took a hand in choosing his bride, Athenais, renamed Eudokia. The new emperor's wife was also endowed with the title of empress.³ As a result the two women became bitter rivals for influence and power at the court. But even after Eudokia's departure from Constantinople, protocol demanded that letters to the emperor had to be addressed to all those who held the *basileia*, that is, to Theodosius II, Eudokia, and Pulcheria.⁴ The deaths of her brother and his wife eventually left Pulcheria triumphant, and she celebrated her position by selecting Marcian as the next emperor and by reversing her brother's religious policy. At the Council of Chalcedon in 451 the new ruling couple were acclaimed as a New Constantine and a New Helena.⁵ Similar circumstances meant that the scenario of rival empresses would recur in Byzantium. A particularly striking example occurred in the seventh century when Emperor Herakleios returned from his campaign against the Persians in 628. His second wife,

Martina, accompanied him as the crowned empress. But sixteen years previously, in October 612 less than two months after the death of his first wife, he had already bestowed the title of empress on his one-year-old daughter Epiphaneia-Eudokia in order to fill the position.⁶ Eudokia, now aged seventeen, had been empress in Constantinople all her life and was clearly a rival to her stepmother, Martina. Herakleios arranged for her to be removed from the capital by sending her off to marry a Turkish leader, who had aided Herakleios in his victory over Persia. Indeed, according to Patriarch Nikephoros, the military alliance had been sealed only by the promise of this imperial bride.⁷ But when it was discovered that he had died, Eudokia was recalled. Later Patriarch Kyros of Alexandria proposed that she should be married to a Saracen leader, but Herakleios would not allow it.⁸ Her presence at the court must have posed certain problems and heightened the competitive atmosphere, which Martina probably dealt with perhaps even before her husband died.⁹

Once we broaden our view to take in a plurality of empresses, we can begin to realize the multiplicity of imperial quarters and attendants, female staff and eunuchs, required to look after them. Nonetheless, one, usually the emperor's wife, exercised supreme authority within the *gynaikonitis*, the female quarters, which occupied a significant part of the Great Palace compound. She presided over the court of women, *sekreton ton gynaikon*, controlling her own chambers and the quarters of her personal servants (women and eunuchs), who attended to her every need. They also accompanied her whenever she visited other parts of the Palace, or attended court ceremonies inside or outside the walled complex, in the city and its environs.

The size of this team must have been considerable, although most estimates remain guesses. Lynda Garland puts the figure at more than 1,000.¹⁰ If recent calculations of the number of men holding court titles is any guide, there were probably twice that number in the late ninth century. According to Kazhdan and McCormick, about 1,600 guests (all male) were invited to the imperial banquets held between Christmas and Epiphany. If most of them were married, this would give us a similar figure for the wives. But they note: "females of all ranks are almost totally absent from court treatises."¹¹ Similarly, when the emperor and empress received the court in the galleries of Hagia Sophia during the Easter celebrations, the space could have accommodated nearly 3,000 people.¹² As it was not unknown for an empress to go out accompanied by around 4,000 persons, many of whom must have been her personal bodyguard of armed soldiers, the figure of 1,000 for the female and eunuch staff of her quarters may be too low.¹³ They were certainly very numerous and were probably organized in a strict court hierarchy similar to that of other officials,

which is recorded in the seating plans for imperial banquets.

Within the vast walled complex that was the Great Palace there does not seem to have been any shortage of space for new buildings or the adaptation of older structures to serve new purposes for the empresses. The area embraced a large number of public reception halls, private quarters, official court buildings, and less formal facilities: churches, baths, and gardens, all within the fortifications. The multiplication of additional spaces reserved for empresses created more employment for women and eunuchs, who assisted in the business of looking after all the individuals who bore the imperial title and some who did not. As my topic suggests, I think it is helpful to draw attention to the significant number of courtiers and servants who attended each leading lady and were therefore attached to the court.

Similar cohorts of women can be identified in other medieval courts, particularly under the rule of Charlemagne, whose interest in rivalling Byzantium extended far beyond the imperial title.¹⁴ The establishment of a more permanent court at Aachen with its grand octagonal church modeled on San Vitale in Ravenna, the palace complex with reception halls, the court school and housing for office holders, constituted a break with Frankish practice. From regular movement around a circuit of palace and monastic centers, the Second Rome became the site of a fixed imperial court, where Charlemagne chose to spend Christmas and bathed in the warm springs with all his male courtiers.¹⁵ As he liked to keep his many daughters near him, their presence introduced an element familiar to the Byzantine court—a group of elite women who required their own quarters and servants, with one significant difference: the Eastern tradition of employing eunuchs to attend imperial women was unknown.¹⁶

In contrast, at the Byzantine court, as in Muslim society, the presence of eunuchs was common. The body of castrated males who held posts that involved proximity to the emperor and empress of Constantinople constituted a very particular group of courtiers, recently characterized as “the court aristocracy par excellence ... functionally and ideologically an aristocracy of service.”¹⁷ The empress had her own eunuch staff whose titles document some of the resources at her disposal: officials in charge of her bedchamber and wardrobe were obviously in daily contact with her; and those who attended to her dining room, her treasury, her stables (carriages and horses), as well as her estates outside the Great Palace, would consult her on a regular basis. Their recruitment and training have been studied, although the ways that they advanced their careers within the imperial service are not entirely clear.¹⁸ In addition to these personal servants, the court contained a whole hierarchy of eunuch positions, reserved to the “beardless men,” who might be summoned to the

empress, along with anyone else she wished to see (not only dancers, musicians, her relatives and friends, but also generals, bishops, monks, or holy men). Access to the empress's quarters was however guarded by her personal eunuchs.

SPACES UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE EMPRESS

Recent research has highlighted the ways in which space and gender are interrelated: the former “reflects and affects the ways in which gender is constructed and understood.”¹⁹ While this applies particularly to present-day situations where women have traditionally been denied any public space, it's useful to consider space and gender in relation to the empresses in Byzantium. Establishing the quarters reserved for each empress, over which she had some control, was probably significant for her own understanding of her role and her person. Even if the eunuch guards were employed specifically to keep her inside the designated female quarters, she could nonetheless realize some autonomy. And even if these quarters remained essentially private, that is, domestic rather than public spaces, she could restrict access to them.

One of the most significant spaces reserved for the use of the empress was the *Porphyra*, a chamber revetted in purple stone or marble or hung with purple cloth from which it took its name. It was designed as the room where the wife of the ruling emperor would give birth to their children, thus ensuring their legitimacy as well as providing the most expert medical care at what was always a dangerous moment. Many empresses died in childbirth, and many imperial babies did not survive long. By constructing a special unit, Emperor Leo III or his son, Constantine V, wished to protect their wives and children as well as enhancing their status. The first use of the term with this meaning is recorded in 763 in a contract written in Naples, which uses the term “porfilogenito” of Leo, the son of Constantine V, in its dating clause. This is a reference to Leo IV the Khazar who was born in January 750, so the new chamber must have been constructed by that date.²⁰

Since the sixth century the term “porphyrogennetos” had already been used of children born after their fathers became emperor (that is, when they took on the purple cloak of royalty). It acquired an even greater importance when imperial children were brought into the world in this special chamber, and became literally “born in the purple.” In the early tenth century, it was crucial for Leo VI, who had already lost three wives, that his mistress, Zoe Karbonopsina, should give birth in the *Porphyra*. This would confer legitimacy on the child

who turned out to be his first and only son, Constantine. So although the couple could not get married before the birth, the emperor made sure that Zoe's child could claim the epithet "porphyrogennetos," and indeed it became his soubriquet. The Porphyra remained in use even after the Komnenoi moved most of the court functions to the Blachernai palace, and emperors who were born far from Constantinople and the Great Palace chose to adopt it as a mark of its great esteem.

For an equally important birth in 1169, which proved to be that of Alexios, the only son of Manuel I Komnenos, the preparation of the Porphyra is richly described in a sermon analyzed by Paul Magdalino.²¹ In addition to the traditional decoration in purple textiles, the maternity bed and cradle in which the newborn baby would lie were decorated with gold-embroidered curtains and pearl-studded covers, and the chamber was blessed by the patriarch before the empress entered it to give birth. News of the successful delivery was trumpeted from the entrance to the Great Palace, and a red, pearl-embroidered slipper was suspended from the gallery above. This last feature was a new element, introduced for the first time in 1118 to mark the birth of Manuel. In the thirteenth century, the rulers of the empire of Nicaea and even the Latin rulers of the capital city assumed the title, *porphyrogennetos*, probably reflecting a reversion to its original meaning of being born into the ruling dynasty. After the recapture of the city in 1261, however, the ritual of suspending the red slipper was revived.²²

In addition to its function as a birthing chamber and the room where all courtiers presented their congratulations to the empress on the eighth day after her successful delivery,²³ the empress used the Porphyra for other ceremonial events, such as the distribution of funds to important ladies of the court. Although it does not appear to have formed part of the *sekreton ton gynaikon*, it was one of the areas under her direct control. This is confirmed by the gruesome act performed in 797 when Empress Irene ordered that her son be blinded in the very room where he had been born; Emperor Constantine VI was thus rendered incapable of ruling, and Irene took sole charge of the empire.²⁴

As well as their official quarters many empresses also had private spaces controlled by their most reliable staff.²⁵ These were secret rooms where they could hide visitors, even dungeons where they could detain opponents. From Procopius's account of Theodora's prisons, to the second Theodora's private collection of icons, through to Theophano's facilities for hiding a group of soldiers, empresses had access to and control over space that remained "out-of-bounds," unknown to any but their most trusted servants. How else could

Nikephoros II's wife, Theophano, have concealed enough armed men to facilitate the coup d'état of John Tzimiskes? Remember that at this time, in 969, the imperial bedchamber was in a part of the palace above the Boukoleon, where the rebel, Tzimiskes, sailed into the harbor. Theophano had hidden his supporters inside the palace, and at the appointed time they went out onto the roof to haul him up over the walls in a basket. They then entered the imperial bedchamber (or perhaps the chapel attached to the church of the Pharos nearby) and assassinated Nikephoros.²⁶

IMPERIAL SERVANTS

Since the purpose of any imperial marriage was the production of heirs, the nurses who looked after the empress's children must have been particularly important personal servants within the *gynaikonitis*. Wet nurses were employed to feed babies if the empress was unable or did not wish to breastfeed them, and others looked after the toddlers.²⁷ Those in charge of baby Constantine, the son of Theophilos and Theodora, who allowed him to fall into a cistern in the palace gardens, where he drowned, must have paid heavily for their neglect of the crowned heir.²⁸ We also learn of their central roles inside the palace in indirect ways. When Romanos II died in May 963, his wife Theophano had just given birth to a daughter, Anna, and their young sons Basil and Constantine were "in the charge of nurses."²⁹ Once established as emperor, Nikephoros Phokas initially banished the widowed empress to the palace or monastery of Petrion, but in September of the same year, she was recalled to marry him. Throughout those difficult months, the nurses performed an utterly central role, looking after the future emperors.

In addition to the nurses, imperial children required tutors, and several assisted their students in fuller fashion, for instance, Theodore, who taught and advised Constantine Porphyrogennetos during his long period of seclusion from imperial authority.³⁰ In turn Constantine ensured the education of his five daughters to such a high standard that he could employ Agatha as his personal assistant on official matters of imperial administration. Since the Great Palace regularly housed foreign princes and princesses, who were held hostage for their parents' good behavior, there must have been other children of school age who required lessons. I think we have to imagine classes in which these hostages joined the imperial children and children of some high-ranking court officials, who also served as playmates. Constantine VII had had such a friend in Basil Peteinos, whom he promoted as soon as he became sole emperor.³¹

While most of this education was done by male teachers or eunuchs, we must not discount the training provided by women attached to the court who instructed young empresses and their children in the order of ceremonies and appropriate behavior. The ladies-in-waiting, *koubikoulariai*, had an important function beyond their attendance on the empress whenever she moved around the palace. And there must always have been a large number of female staff who managed the empress's personal makeup and hairstyles, her wardrobe, and visits to the baths within the palace, to name only a few of the more specialized tasks.

Her staff included the palace eunuchs who had responsibility for her wardrobe, treasury, dining room, stables, and estates, some known only from their seals, and entertainers such as jesters or the dwarf Denderis, who used to come and go as they pleased.³² These personal servants of the emperor and empress, who attended them in a personal capacity and lived in the palace, must be distinguished from the court eunuchs who held positions that could be purchased. Many rulers relied on the services of their eunuchs and promoted them to important posts, both military and civilian. Theophilos appointed his *logothetes tou dromou* Theoktistos and the *magistros* Manuel as regents for his young son, and in this capacity they both lived in the Great Palace and advised Empress Theodora.³³

Every empress may have appointed her own ladies-in-waiting, but she probably inherited an experienced staff of women who knew the routines and rituals of the Great Palace. Older women who had assisted previous empresses were able to advise and instruct the young incoming bride, especially if she was an outsider from a different culture where the very long, grand ceremonies of Constantinople were unknown. Among the ladies-in-waiting were some who themselves became empress; consider Theodote, the *koubikoularia* of Maria of Amnia, who replaced her in the affections of Constantine VI in the 790s; or Zoe Zaoutze, who attracted the attention of Leo VI one century later; or the Alan princess, who became Constantine IX's mistress after the death of Maria Skleraina. According to Psellos, the emperor installed her in a separate palace, gave her vast amounts of gold and presents, and insisted on her holding the titles of *auguste* and *sebaste*, also given to his previous mistress. Only the firm opposition of Empress Theodora, Zoe's sister, prevented Constantine from moving the Alan princess into the official imperial quarters.³⁴

Foreigners also formed a distinct part of the imperial court, many of them hostages held in a form of gilded captivity for the good behavior of their fathers. Their presence reflects the importance attached to diplomacy in Byzantium, and the practice of taking hostages to ensure that diplomatic agreements were effective.³⁵ The

Alan princess was certainly a hostage who successfully maintained the close and cordial relations between the country of her birth and the empire: when her father visited Constantinople the emperor presented her as equivalent to his wife. Other foreign princesses came to Byzantium as brides for young princes who were being groomed for supreme power.³⁶ When Theophano instructed Nikephoros II to leave the bedchamber unlocked and thus facilitated his murder, she told him that she had to attend to some young women from Mysia (that is, Bulgaria), who had just arrived in Constantinople and had to be welcomed into their quarters within the Great Palace.³⁷ It's been suggested that they were possible brides for her two sons, Basil and Constantine, whom the empress must have intended to marry to suitable young women.³⁸ While Constantine later chose a local woman, Basil refused all her plans and remained unmarried. When he needed an empress, he probably appointed his sister Anna to fulfill the role, and after her marriage to Vladimir of Kiev, his niece Zoe.³⁹

In addition to the high-ranking ladies who were present at the court and sometimes succeeded in winning the emperor's affections, there were a large number of servant girls and slaves. Rulers frequently took advantage of them; Theophilos is said to have committed adultery with one of his wife's female slaves or servants, and Romanos Lekapenos fathered a son, Basil, by a slave woman identified as "Skythian."⁴⁰ Although the boy was castrated so that he could not aspire to imperial authority, he managed to dominate the imperial court for many decades, as brother-in-law of Constantine VII and uncle of Romanos II. He rose to the position of *parakoimomenos* and became a very rich and powerful courtier until 985, when Emperor Basil II exiled him and confiscated his property. One wonders if his Skythian mother had been permitted to share in his glory.

Among the slaves some female prisoners of war were retained by the emperor and kept in the Great Palace. Genesios reports that Theophilos consulted an Arab slave who was reputed to foretell the future; he was not pleased when she informed him that the Martenakios family would rule longer than his, or that his widow and son would reverse his policy of iconoclasm.⁴¹ Similarly, it was another female servant born in the palace (that is, to a slave mother) who cried out a prophesy, trying to warn Michael I Rhangabe about the plot against him.⁴² Their powers of clairvoyance may have been invented, as well as their prophecies, but they came to the emperors' attention because they were close at hand. Some were obviously born to palace slaves, indicating one of the chief ways by which the unfree population expanded.

The Palace population also increased when a newly appointed empress arrived in Constantinople with her relations. A whole tribe of

Paphlagonians accompanied Maria of Amnia, including her mother, her sisters (who also made advantageous marriages), her grandparents, her brothers, and the other female contestants in the bride show.⁴³ All these relatives needed their own apartments, either quarters within the Great Palace or in suburban palaces where they could be supervised and observed to make sure they didn't plot revolts or make any trouble for the emperor. So little palaces within palaces had to be created and maintained, which expanded the number of servants, eunuch staff, and women. Many mothers accompanied their daughters to the imperial office, for instance, Theodora's mother, Theoktiste, for whom Theophilos created the new title of *zoste patrikia*.⁴⁴ It seems likely that Anastaso/Theophano, Romanos II's wife, brought her mother, Maria, to the palace. In 969 after the coup against Nikephoros Phokas, Basil the *parakoimomenos* exiled Theophano to a monastery in the Armeniakon *thema*, and her mother to another in the Boukellarion.⁴⁵

But seven years later, when John I died and Basil II and Constantine VIII formally became rulers, they recalled their mother Empress Theophano to the palace.⁴⁶ And there she again met her sister-in-law, Empress Theodora, the widow of John Tzimiskes, who was the young emperors' aunt and had performed the role of the senior empress during his reign. It may have been quite a delicate matter for the *praipositos* (chief eunuch in charge of protocol) to decide on the appropriate precedence: Theophano was indeed the mother of the young rulers, but she had been exiled on the orders of Basil the *parakoimomenos*, who still held sway in the Great Palace; and Theodora was a princess born in the purple who had spent much of her life in the Palace, knew its traditions and had run the women's quarters for the past six years. Sadly, the historians of the period do not reveal many hints about the ways the imperial court handled this rivalry. But a plurality of empresses usually led to frictions that can be traced in several incidents.

One key example of this plethora of potential empresses and rivals occurred after 919, when Romanos Lekapenos established his family in the Great Palace. Empress Zoe Karbonopsina, widow of Leo VI, was promptly expelled from the palace and Romanos established his wife Theodora in the *gynaikonitis* and his four sons and four daughters. Helena was the most prominent because she was married to Zoe's son, Constantine Porphyrogennetos, then fourteen years old.⁴⁷ Although they were both children, they had to have appropriate living space in the Great Palace. They were gradually excluded from the imperial succession by the promotion of the three older Lekapenoi, Christopher, Stephen, and Constantine, crowned co-emperors in 921.⁴⁸ When Romanos's wife died in 922, the emperor crowned his daughter-

in-law Sophia, Christopher's wife, as empress, thus reinforcing his own grip on the succession.⁴⁹ This serves as a reminder that the Lekapenos dynasty, which had usurped imperial power, was always anxious about the ambitions of the Macedonians, represented by Constantine VII and Helena. And amid these tensions, the couple that occupied the most important quarters tried to reduce the power of the others.

When he wasn't promoting his own children Romanos arranged the marriages of his grandchildren, Maria, daughter of Christopher and Sophia, and then Romanos, son of Constantine VII and Helena.⁵⁰ Until her marriage to Peter of Bulgaria in 927 Maria Lekapena had lived in the palace and even afterward she continued to keep in touch with her birth family. She represents the out-going Byzantine princess, who had to perform an ambassadorial role in the country of her new husband.⁵¹ In contrast, when Bertha, the illegitimate daughter of King Hugh arrived from Provence in 944 to be betrothed to Romanos, she was only five years old. She brought great riches, was renamed Eudokia, and must have occupied a prominent space in the Great Palace as the empress-elect until her death at the age of ten.⁵²

A second example occurred later in the 940s. By 945 Constantine and Helena had triumphed over the Lekapenoi and took on the powers and roles as well as the names of emperor and empress. They had also produced a large family of six, requiring a number of nurses, nannies, and teachers to look after them all within the palace. In 959, when Constantine VII died and Romanos II became emperor, his wife, Theophano, acceded to the highest-ranking imperial position and tried to persuade her husband to banish his mother and sisters from the Great Palace. His sisters were removed to a nunnery, although they didn't take their monastic status seriously, but Helena refused to go, and after much pleading Romanos allowed her to stay.⁵³ Relations between the empress-mother and Empress Theophano appear to have been difficult, and when Helena died she was buried at her father's foundation, rather than with her husband Constantine VII in the imperial mausoleum.

In these two examples that followed from the Lekapenos revolt of 919 it's possible to grasp some of the complexities that dominated the court hierarchy, normally so dedicated to order and tradition. While the young prince Constantine, who was born in the purple and had never lived outside the Great Palace, was forcibly distanced from the exercise of imperial power, his brothers-in-law were endowed with higher ranks until they were acclaimed before him, and eventually his name was removed from the imperial acclamations altogether. How did his wife, Helena, react to the idea that she would not become empress? Did she urge her husband to try and regain his authority?⁵⁴ It's not difficult to see that if they were to survive with their official

titles and in control of their physical space inside the palace, Helena and Constantine may have had to maneuver and campaign against opposing factions, using their trusted eunuch and female servants. This produced considerable rivalry between the generations, usually between senior empresses, mothers of imperial children, and their daughters-in-law.

At moments of transition empresses might have to take on very specific new tasks, especially if their husbands died before their sons were old enough to assume imperial power. These are the familiar circumstances in which imperial women occasionally become dominant figures at court, partly because the law recognized their maternal authority and Byzantine society accepted their inherent determination to protect their young sons. Thus, Martina, Irene, Theodora, Zoe Karbonopsina, Eudokia Makrembolitissa, and Maria/Marta of Alania emerged as protectors who fought for their sons' rights to inherit, and gained influence on the councils of regency that governed for the young emperors. They also arranged their marriages. Some were more successful than others in meeting the challenge of imperial government, but nearly all of them tried to extend their power far beyond that of most imperial wives; some even managed the administration of the empire for a number of years. In the case of Irene, it's clear that her example inspired later empresses, such as Theophano, her relative, who wanted to rule through her husband, Stavrakios,⁵⁵ or Theodora, who ruled for her young son Michael III for fourteen years.

Normally the ruling emperor expected his wife to be a commanding figure, with the title *auguste* and *basilissa*, who would accompany him on official ceremonies and run the *gynaikonitis* in the Great Palace. But if his mother or mistress could successfully monopolize power, it was very hard for the legitimate wife and nominal empress. On numerous occasions the widow of the recently deceased emperor made life very difficult for her successor: Empress Sophia was very hostile to Tiberios's wife and wouldn't let her into the imperial quarters; Eudokia Dekapolitissa might live in the imperial quarters set aside for the empress, with her ladies and eunuchs, but if Michael III frequented other parts of the palace where he had installed his mistress, she had no redress. Similarly, in the eleventh century Theodora had to live through the extraordinary and humiliating period of her sister Zoe's third marriage, when there were three empresses: the two *porphyrogennetoi* sisters and Maria Skleraina, Constantine IX's mistress. The emperor had insisted on giving his mistress a suitably grand title, *sebaste*, as well as *despoina*, she was even called the second empress, *he deutera basilis*.⁵⁶ According to Psellos the population of Constantinople supported Zoe and Theodora, "our mothers in the purple," and fetched

Theodora from her monastic exile in 1042, as well as championing her imperial claims in 1055.⁵⁷

Twenty years later, at the tense moment of Alexios Komnenos's coup d'état, Empress Maria of Alania and her son Constantine Doukas represented a considerable force within the Great Palace. As the wife of Michael VII (who abdicated and went into a monastery), and then the widow of Nikephoros III Botaneiates, Maria had adopted Alexios as her son. The rumor was that she wanted to make him her third husband and thus remain empress.⁵⁸ While she had filled this role for many years and knew the ceremonial rhythm of the court, Alexios's wife Irene Doukaina was barely fifteen years old and had no experience of it. When he hesitated to bring Irene into the Palace, his mother, Anna Dalassene, advised him to do so quickly, and the old empress had to give way to the new one. Maria of Alania was thus removed from power, but she made sure that her son's rights would be respected. Indeed, they were later strengthened by the engagement made between Alexios and Irene's daughter Anna and Constantine Doukas, as Anna proudly relates in her *Alexias*.⁵⁹

Alexios I then proceeded to install his mother as regent while he campaigned, leaving his wife Irene in a distinctly junior position. Again, Anna is witness to the monastic routine installed by her grandmother, who was determined to curb the loose court behavior of previous years. As mother of the emperor, the widowed Anna Dalassene was given extraordinary powers, though not the title of empress.⁶⁰ She must also have reinforced the emperor's decision to restrict court honors to members of the Komnenos dynasty, which resulted in a reform of titles and a new hierarchy based on the term *sebastos*.⁶¹ Throughout this period, the emperor's wife Irene remained a less powerful figure, although her devotion to motherhood and the raising of her large family may have been appreciated.⁶²

Other occasions arose when there were in effect multiple empresses at the imperial court in Byzantium, especially in the fourteenth century, as the battle between the Palaiologos and Kantakouzenos families created rival court hierarchies. But the main point I wish to emphasize is that we have to recognize the structural reasons for a plurality of empresses if we are to understand the role of the emperor's consort in Byzantium. Even if imperial ideology assumed that there should be only one leading lady, circumstances frequently generated more than one.

As a final example, let's consider the case of the young French princess Agnes, who arrived to marry Alexios II Komnenos in 1180 when there were already two empresses in the Byzantine court: Maria the *porphyrogenetos* and Maria of Antioch.⁶³ She was barely renamed Anna and installed as the third before her young husband was

overthrown by his uncle Andronikos. And the new master of the empire then decided to legitimize his coup d'état by marrying her.⁶⁴ So she remained empress for a short time, though her reaction to her new husband is unknown. He was over 50 years older than her and brought his mistress along with him. In addition to his delight in picnics by the Bosphorus accompanied by flute girls and other entertainers,⁶⁵ his murders provoked a savage reaction, and in 1185, after ruling for three years, he was cut to pieces in the Hippodrome. Once freed of this marriage, Anna remained in Constantinople as an ex-empress, and drew a state pension to support her position until the Latin conquest of 1204, when she finally married Theodoros Branas.

Anna's fate illustrates one of the many reasons why an empress might not succeed in the imperial role. Her husband could be overthrown in a military coup or a palace rebellion. She could fail to produce a son and heir for her husband, who might then try to get rid of her (Maria of Amnia). Her male relatives might decide that they could rule better and mount a palace coup against her regency (Theodora removed by her brother Bardas, in the name of her young son Michael III). And even if she remained in the imperial quarters of the Great Palace and retained her title, she might suffer the indignity of watching her husband take mistresses from among the many women who were always available (slaves, servant girls, their own ladies-in-waiting, or foreign princesses).

To be the wife of the ruling emperor was certainly some guarantee of honor, position, space, and power. But as soon as her husband died or lost his own imperial position, she had to fend for herself. No wonder the anxious Empress Aikaterine, wife of Isaac Komnenos I, begged him not to retire into a monastery, leaving her and their daughter unprotected. But he insisted, and so she too had to seek a refuge at the monastery of the Myrelaion, where she and eventually her daughter were also buried.⁶⁶ This was the not uncommon fate of many empresses, who lost their positions at the summit of the imperial court hierarchy. Some like Anna Komnene still clung to the past when they had aspired to imperial power; others continued to hope against hope that they would return to the Great Palace and their official quarters. And some did (Maria, the mother of Euphrosyne, if she was still alive in 820; Zoe Karbonopsina in 913; Theophano in 976). These grand ladies never gave up the title of empress or the privileges and honors that went with it. But even the most successful found themselves replaced by a younger generation that included the new empress, wife of the ruling emperor, and had to adjust their expectations to novel circumstances. They belonged to a world in which there was a plurality of empresses, and each had to find her place in the pecking order.

1. Kekaumenos, *Strategikon*, ed. B Wassiliewsky and V. Jernstedt, *Cecaumeni Strategicon et incerti scriptoris de officiis regis libellus* (St. Petersburg, 1896; repr. Amsterdam, 1965), 74.

2. On the necessity of an empress to preside over the female sector of the court, see the demand put to Michael II; Theophanes Continuatus, 78; and the letter of Nikolaos Mystikos, authorizing a third marriage for Leo VI, *Letters*, ed. R. Jenkins and L. Westerink (Washington, DC, 1973), Ep. 32.77–84.

3. Kenneth Holum, *Theodosian Emperresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1982), 175–216.

4. *Ibid.*, 175–76; cf. 194, 218–19, on the continuing power of Eudokia in Bethlehem, where she held the *basileia* and behaved as an empress.

5. *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, trans. Richard Price and Michael Gaddis, 3 vols. (Liverpool, 2005), 2, 240, preceded by many additional acclamations of the rulers; cf. C. Angelidi, *Pulcheria: La castità al potere* (Milan, 1998); H. Chadwick, *East and West: The Making of a Rift in the Church* (Oxford, 2003), 34–49.

6. *Chronikon Paschale, années 612 et 613*, ed. L. Dindorf, 2 vols. (Bonn, 1832), I, 703; Eng. trans. *Chronicon Paschale 284–628 AD*, Michael Whitby and Mary Whitby (Liverpool, 1989), 154, notes the role of Philaretos and Synetos, who accompanied the child to the Great Church after her coronation in the Great Palace; see also *Theopanes*, AM 6104, I, 300; trans. Mango and Scott, 430.

7. Constantin Zuckerman, “La petite Augusta et le Turc: Epiphanie-Eudocie sur les monnaies d’Héraclius,” *Revue numismatique* 6 (1995), 113–23; Paul Speck, “Epiphania et Martine sur les monnaies d’Héraclius, *ibid.*, 152 (1997), 457–65; and the reply by Zuckermann, *ibid.*, 473–78.

8. *Nikephoros*, chs. 12, 18, and 34; Eng. trans. 55–56, 67, and 73. James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford, 2010), analyzes all the sources for the role of the Turks in the war with Persia—see, for example, 114–15, 123–24, 136, 200—but does not mention the proposed marriage.

9. Mango, *Short History*, 188, points out that the acclamations recorded in *De Cerimoniis* for 4 January 639 omit Eudokia, which implies that she was no longer alive.

10. Lynda Garland, *Byzantine Emperresses: Women and Power in Byzantium, 527–1204* (London, 1999), 5.

11. Alexander P. Kazhdan and Michael McCormick, “The Social World of the Byzantine Court,” in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829–1204*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, DC, 1997), 167–98, esp. 176 and 182.

12. *Ibid.*, 175.

13. Theodora’s trip to the hot springs at Pythion with 4,000 attendants, *Ioannis Malalae Chronographia*, ed. Ioannes Thurn (Berlin, 2000), bk. 18.25; *The Chronicle of John Malalas*, trans. Elizabeth Jeffreys, Michael Jeffreys, and Roger Scott (Melbourne, 1986), 256.

14. Janet Nelson, “Women at the court of Charlemagne: A Case of Monstrous Regiment?,” in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Carmi Parsons (Stroud, 1994), 43–61; eadem, “Was Charlemagne’s Court a Courtly Society?,” in *Court Culture in the Early Middle Ages: The Proceedings of the First Alcuin Conference*, ed. Catherine Cubitt (Leiden, 2003), 39–57.

15. See *Court Culture*, ed. Cubitt, as earlier; J. Shepard, “Courts in East and West,” in *The Medieval World*, ed. Peter Linehan and Janet Nelson (Cambridge, UK, 2001), 14–36.

16. Janet L. Nelson, “La famille de Charlemagne,” *B* 61 (1995), 194–212, esp.

211, where she compares the role played by his daughters to that of the eunuchs of the imperial court in Constantinople.

17. Paul Magdalino, "Court Society and Aristocracy," in *A Social History of Byzantium*, ed. John Haldon (Chichester, 2009), 212–32, esp. 221, 223.

18. Kathryn Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago, 2003), 163–93; Shaun Tougher, "Byzantine Eunuchs: An Overview with Special Reference to Their Creation and Origin," in *Women, Men and Eunuchs, Gender in Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (London, 1997), 168–84; Anne McClanan, *Representations of Early Byzantine Empresses: Image and Empire* (New York, 2002), in particular, 179–83; Judith Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire* (London/Princeton, 2008), 160–69. On the power relations of eunuchs, see Liz James, "Men, Women, Eunuchs: Gender, Sex and Power," in *The Social History of Byzantium*, ed. John Haldon (as in note 17), 31–50.

19. See the discussion of the work of Doreen Massey and Luce Irigaray in Stavroula Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances: Reading the Body in Byzantine Passions and Lives of Holy Women* (Uppsala, 2007), 162–65, and the analysis of gendered space in the lives of several holy women, 167–92.

20. G. Dagron, "Nés dans la pourpre," *TM* 12 (1994), 105–42, esp. 113.

21. Paul Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–80* (Cambridge, UK, 1993), 243–44.

22. *Ibid.*, 244, n. 40.

23. *DC*, I, 615–19.

24. *Theopanes*, AM 6289, I, 472; trans. Mango and Scott, 648–49.

25. Psellos, *Chronographia*, bk. 6, 144; Eng. trans., 232, on Constantine's favorite, the clown Romanos Boilas, who "had the keys to the secret entrances" and charmed the empresses Zoe and Theodora.

26. Leo the Deacon, bk. 5, 6–8 (who also reports that the arrival of armed men had alerted some palace servants to the plot but that Michael, the chamberlain (*epi tou koitonos*) in charge, who ordered a thorough search, had been unable to find them); Alice-Mary Talbot and Dennis Sullivan, *The History of Leo the Deacon*, intro., trans., and ann., *Dumbarton Oaks Studies* XLI (Washington, DC, 2005), 136–39. On the problems posed by this mention of the Boukoleon palace, see R. Guiland, "La Palais de Boukoléon. L'assassinat de Nicéphore II Phokas," *BS* 13 (1952/53), 101–36; C. Mango, "The Palace of the Boukoleon," *Cahiers archéologiques* 45 (1997), 41–50.

27. J. Beaucamp, "L'allaitement: mère ou nourrice?," *JÖB* 32, no. 2 (1982), 549–58; C. Bourbou and S. J. Garvie-Lok, "Breastfeeding and weaning patterns in Byzantine times," in *Becoming Byzantine: Children and Childhood in Byzantium*, ed. A. Papaconstantinou and A.-M. Talbot (Washington, DC, 2009), 65–83.

28. Theophanes Continuatus, 88.

29. Leo the Deacon, bk. 3, 4; Eng. trans. 91.

30. Ioannes Skylitzes, *Synopsis historiarum*, ed. Ioannes Thurn (Berlin/New York, 1973), 206–12, 233; Eng. trans. John Wortley, *John Skylitzes: A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811–1057* (Cambridge, UK, 2010), 200–205, 225.

31. *Ibid.*, Thurn, 234–35, 238; Eng. trans. 225–26, 230.

32. Theophanes Continuatus, 91–92.

33. Genesios, *Basileiai*, 4.1, 4.8; Anthony Kaldellis, trans. and comm., *Genesios on the Reigns of the Emperors* (Canberra, 1998), 71, 77.

34. Psellos, *Chronographia*, bk. 6, 145, 151–56; Eng. trans. 231–32, 235–37.

35. Jonathan Shepard, "Manners Maketh Romans? Young Barbarians at the Emperor's Court," in *Byzantine Style, Religions and Civilization: In Honor of Sir Steven Runciman*, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys (Cambridge, UK, 2006), 135–58, esp. 150–51 on girls.

36. See my analysis of these marriages, “Marriage: A Fundamental Part of Imperial Statecraft,” [chapter 14](#) in this volume.

37. Leo the Deacon, 86; Eng. trans., 137: a priest of the imperial court had given Nikephoros a written warning of a plot against him, and he ordered a thorough search without success; see note 17 earlier.

38. Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, 132.

39. Herrin, as earlier, 213–15. Zoe alludes to her education by her uncle Basil, which would certainly have included court procedure, in a speech attributed to her by Psellos, *Chronographia*, bk. 5, 22; Eng. trans., 135–36.

40. Skylitzes, Thurn, 244, 285–86; Eng. trans. 235, 272–73.

41. Genesios, *Basileiai*, 3.15; Eng. trans., 65; expanded by Skylitzes, Thurn, 72–73; Eng. trans. 73–74.

42. Genesios, *Basileiai*, 4.1, 4.8; Eng. trans., 71, 78; Skylitzes, Thurn, 11–12; Eng. trans., 12–13.

43. *The Life of St. Philaretos the Merciful Written by His Grandson Niketas*, ed. L. Rydén (Uppsala, 2002), 4, 82–93, esp. 92.

44. Theophanes Continuatus, 89; Genesios, bk. 4.2; Kaldellis trans., 72.

45. Skylitzes, Thurn, 285–86; Eng. trans., 272–73; cf. Fr. trans. *Jean Skylitzès: Empereurs de Constantinople*, Bernard Flusin and Jean-Claude Cheynet (Paris, 2003), 240 and n. 12.

46. *Ibid.*, Thurn, 314; Eng. trans., 238–39.

47. *Ibid.*, Thurn, 208–9, 211–3; Eng. trans., 201–3, 204–6.

48. *Ibid.*, Thurn, 214–15; Eng. trans., 208.

49. *Ibid.*, Thurn, 215–16; Eng. trans., 209.

50. *Ibid.*, Thurn, 223–24, 231; Eng. trans., 215–16, 223.

51. J. Shepard, “Marriages toward the Millennium,” in *Byzantium in the Year 1000*, ed. P. Magdalino (Leiden, 2003), 1–33.

52. See most recently, Günter Prinzing, “Emperor Constantine VII and Margrave Berengar II of Ivrea under Suspicion of Murder: Circumstantial Evidence of a Plot against King Hugh’s Children, Berta-Eudokia and Lothair (Lothar),” in *Centre and Periphery in the Age of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos*, ed. Niels Gaul (Oxford, 2012, forthcoming). I thank Professor Prinzing for allowing me to read his paper prior to its publication.

53. *Ibid.*, Thurn, 252; Eng. trans., 243.

54. Arnold Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and His World* (London, 1973), 11–12, 21–22, draws attention to Helen’s authority and influence over her husband.

55. *Theopanes*, AM 6303; trans. Mango and Scott, 674–75; J. Herrin, *Women in Purple*, 149–50.

56. Psellos, bk. 6, 50–60, 64; Eng. trans., 180–84, 186.

57. *Ibid.*, bk. 5, 34–38, 51; Eng. trans., 142–44, 151.

58. Lynda Garland and Stephen Rapp, “Mary ‘of Alania’: Woman and Empress between Two Worlds,” in *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience 800–1200*, ed. Lynda Garland (Aldershot, UK, 2006), 91–124.

59. *Annae Comnenae Alexias*, ed. D. Reinsch and A. Kambylis, 2 vols. (Berlin/New York, 2001), I, bk. 3, 4.5–7, bk. 6, 8; Eng. trans., E.R.A. Sewter, *The Alexiad of Anna Comnena* (Harmondsworth, UK, 1969), 113–20, 197.

60. Élisabeth Malamut, “Une femme politique d’exception à la fin du XI^e siècle: Anne Dalassène,” in *Femmes et pouvoirs des femmes à Byzance et en Occident (VI^e–XI^e siècles)*, ed. Stéphane Lebecq et al. (Lille, 1999), 103–20.

61. L. Stiernon, “Notes de titulature et de prosopographie: Sébaste et gambros,” *REB* 23 (1965), 226–32; Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, as earlier, 180–92, on “the dominance and solidarity of a large but tightly structured kin group,” which created a new hierarchy, the Komnenian family system.

62. Barbara Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium 1025–1204: Power, Patronage and Ideology* (Essex, 1999), 78–87, contrasts the roles of mother and wife within the Komnenian system of government, using the funeral orations pronounced over several leading women.

63. The event was celebrated in verses composed for the occasion and is depicted in a famous manuscript, Vaticanus gr. 1851; see Ioannes Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts* (Leiden, 1976); Paolo Cesaretti, *L'impero perduta: Vita di Anna di Bisanzio, una sovrana fra Oriente e Occidente* (Milan, 2006), 71–80, 86–92, 100–104.

64. *N. Ch.*, 357; ed. I. A. Van Dieten (Berlin/New York, 1975), 275–76; Eng. trans. Harry Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium, Annals of Niketas Choniates* (Detroit, 1984), 153.

65. *Ibid.*, ed. Bekker, 417, 452; ed. Van Dieten, 321–22, 349; Eng. trans. Magoulias, 177, 191 (with the name of his mistress at the time, Maraptike).

66. Psellos, *Chronographia*, VII, 79–83, Eng. trans., Sewter, 324–26; Hill, *Imperial Women*, 61 (although Catherine/Aikaterine was a Bulgarian princess whose mother and brothers accompanied her to Constantinople, so she was not really so isolated); Leonora Neville, “Strong Women and Their Husbands in Byzantine Historiography,” in Paul Stephenson, ed., *The Byzantine World* (London/New York, 2010), 72–82, on the speech reused by Psellos. It's clear that Isaac's abdication also provoked anxiety in Anna Dalassene, when her husband John Komnenos declined to take up the offer of the imperial title: “If someone else gains the empire of the Romans he will quickly move to exterminate our family ...,” Nikephoros Bryennios, *Historia*, ed. P. Gautier (Brussels, 1975), 80–82.

THEOPHANO

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE EDUCATION OF A BYZANTINE PRINCESS



The 1,000th anniversary of the death of Empress Theophano in 991 occasioned a number of studies devoted to her life, including a conference held at Hernen Castle, near Nijmegen, where she lived. Thanks to an invitation from Andrew Palmer, I was prompted to try and re-create the circumstances in which Theophano had been prepared for her ambassadorial role in the West. The task is notable for the complete lack of references to her in the Byzantine sources. So much for the male authors whose biased records normally constitute the written documentation on Byzantine women! In this case they simply declined to name her. Yet she appeared to have made quite an impact in the West when she arrived in 972, and her marriage to the young Otto II, later emperor, had been negotiated for several years and was highly appreciated by her father-in-law, Otto I. So my task was to try and reconstruct the type of education and preparation Theophano might have received in Byzantium.

The result is of course tentative, because it will never be clear exactly how John I Tzimiskes conceived the role that Theophano was to play in his Western alliance. Precedents existed for the use of young women to reinforce diplomatic agreements, so there must have been an expectation of success. Her entourage, dowry, and gifts made a deep impression on those who witnessed her arrival. Clearly, those gifts (silks, ivories, icons, jeweled book covers, and so on) had been selected with that aim in mind. Their influence in Ottonian art seems fairly obvious, though disputed by Western medievalists who wish to stress the autonomous origins of tenth-century art, manuscript illumination, and decoration. But Theophano's personal influence cannot be doubted. Later condemnation of her wearing of silks and jewelry implies that her Byzantine style of dress was copied by others in the West.

The studies also demonstrated quite important influences that may be associated with Theophano's residence in northern Europe, the cults of Sts. Alexios and Pankratios, for example. Her attention to her son's education in Greek and her effort to negotiate a Byzantine bride for him show how she remained attached to her own culture. She also appears to have attended to the education of her three daughters, who entered important monasteries in northern Europe bringing with them some knowledge of Byzantine culture. While this chapter remains hypothetical, it draws on much earlier work on the educational facilities for girls of elite families in Byzantium and the evidently important role attached to those sent out to marry foreigners. This topic is further explored in "Marriage: A Fundamental Element of Imperial Statecraft," [chapter 14](#) in this volume.

WHEN THEOPHANO ARRIVED in Rome in 972 to marry the young

German prince, Otto II, she was presented as a Byzantine princess. While there may have been some doubt as to her precise relationship to the ruling emperor, her clothing and demeanor, her retinue, and her extravagant gifts confirmed a close imperial connection. Not only did she bring with her the luxurious silks and jewels that fascinated Western commentators on the marriage, but also in some way she embodied a prestige associated with brides from Constantinople, qualities that made these Greek princesses especially desirable.

This particular marriage had been pursued for a long time by the bridegroom's father, Otto I; it was part of an ongoing effort to build a diplomatic alliance with Byzantium. And as in all medieval diplomacy, political considerations and goals were of paramount importance. Within this process, successful marriages could seal an alliance and ensure friendly relations probably better than any written agreement. So the younger members of ruling dynasties across Europe were constantly pressed into diplomatic service. Like others before and after her, Theophano played a significant role in the foreign relations of the Byzantine Empire. During the second half of the tenth century, her contribution was similarly subjected to diplomatic needs and political ends. To that extent all Byzantine princesses were expected to represent something over and above their own family's interests, something quintessentially imperial. They had to perform their appointed roles in the empire's developed system of diplomacy.¹

Although Theophano's family background and early life have been the subject of a great number of studies, all the evidence is derived from Western sources. She is simply absent from the Byzantine documents. However, the fact that she performed her diplomatic role in the West with apparent skill suggests a novel method of investigation. Rather than imagine what her life might have been like, I propose to investigate the education of Byzantine princesses in general. This article will therefore examine the preparation they received in order to fulfill their specific tasks, in addition to acting as ambassadors for Byzantium, and thus securing the alliances of cooperation or at least peace, which was the aim of formal diplomacy. Clearly, no two Byzantine princesses were ever the same. But within the formal diplomatic requirements of the term, they had to conform to certain expectations, to meet certain criteria, to fit a preconceived model. Here I will investigate the parameters of this model and then try to discover how well Theophano fitted them.²

By the mid-tenth century the term "Byzantine princess" could designate at least two different types, which have to be distinguished. First, those born in the Purple Chamber of the Great Palace, the *porphyrogennetoi*,³ daughters of reigning emperors or co-emperors, designated heirs to the throne. Thanks to Psellos we have vivid

descriptions of two famous examples, Zoe and Theodora, daughters of Constantine VIII, the last representatives of the Macedonian dynasty.⁴ But there are many others: in the tenth century, Anna and Theodora, sisters of Romanos II. These are purple-born princesses, without peers, the ones so much desired by foreign rulers. Theophano was not of this elite.

Second, in a slightly lower category are those Byzantine princesses related to the ruling family, who were not born in the Porphyry Chamber. Some of these had important connections to those in power and probably had considerable familiarity with the imperial court, for instance, Maria Lekapene, granddaughter of Romanos I, who was married to Peter of Bulgaria.⁵ Theophano may have been among their number.

Third, in a separate category altogether are those who became princesses by marrying into the ruling family from quite different backgrounds. Here, there are three distinct methods of recruitment.

1. By foreign alliance. These foreigners became princesses through political decisions taken in Constantinople with regard to diplomatic relations with external powers. The Khazars provide an interesting example from the seventh century on. Because of their formidable military power and geographic position, Herakleios was interested in a Khazar alliance; later the exiled Justinian II sought refuge with the Khagan and married his sister; and in the 730s a Khazar bride was chosen for Leo III's son, Constantine. These arrangements stemmed from foreign policy and had nothing to do with the suitability of the bride apart from age. However, once the alliance had been agreed and the betrothal settled, pictures of the future bride and groom were exchanged. In a later eighth-century instance, Constantine VI is said to have been so attached to the picture he received of his fiancée, Rotrud, that he wept when the engagement was broken off by his mother, Irene.⁶
2. By internal alliance. Princesses were selected as suitable brides from among aristocratic families of the empire because they brought political support and useful alliances. In this way, Irene, daughter of the Sarandapechys family in central Greece, was chosen in the mid-eighth century to become the wife of Leo IV. After his early death in 775 she eventually ruled as emperor in place of her son Constantine VI. Such alliances also developed from diplomatic concerns.
3. By beauty competition, or bride show. This process is documented in the *Lives* of some of the individuals so chosen

as well as from narrative sources. In the eighth and ninth centuries these Byzantine “Judgments of Paris” provide such circumstantial detail that it seems difficult to doubt the existence of the bride show altogether, though recent studies have emphasized its literary character.⁷ Commissioners were sent throughout the empire to find the most beautiful young ladies, and a prototype of such beauty in the form of an official portrait, the *lauraton*, was circulated. In this way Irene found Maria of Amnia as a bride for Constantine VI, after breaking off his first engagement; Euphrosyne did the same for Theophilos, who chose Theodora over Kassia, and so on. Five instances are documented between 788 and 882.⁸

Nonetheless, these contests left little to chance: notions of suitability, while not made explicit, must have existed; questions of family alliance and regional loyalty played a part. In every case the empress-mother engineered the choice and probably undertook the subsequent training of the successful candidate. For in all cases the incoming bride would become a Byzantine princess and therefore had to be prepared for her new duties, especially if she was to fulfill the role of a future empress.

In addition, from the tenth century onward “Byzantine princesses” were sent abroad to marry important allies, for instance by Leo VI. In about 900 he sent his daughter Anna to marry Louis III, the German, later blinded, and she bore him a son aptly named Charles Constantine, who survived to the 960s as count of Vienne.⁹ Anna was an illegitimate daughter, born to Leo’s mistress Zoe during his first marriage to Theophano the Elder. But the child’s status had been regularized by the subsequent second marriage of Leo to Zoe, and indeed Anna had performed certain important functions at court, as we shall see. She was probably the first of these new female ambassadors for Byzantium; our Theophano is certainly one of the most celebrated.

This practice, however, was in flagrant violation of established Byzantine traditions. For in the middle of the tenth century Constantine VII recorded the diplomatic principle that purple-born princesses should on no account be married to foreigners. The only exception that might be made to this rule, according to this emperor, was in the case of the Franks. In [chapter 13](#) of his *De administrando imperio*, he reports that it was specifically permitted by Constantine I, “because he himself drew his origin from those parts ... [and] because of the fame of those lands and the nobility of those tribes.”¹⁰ The Romans (meaning Byzantines) were, therefore, allowed to intermarry with the Franks (meaning Christians from the western parts of Europe, identified as *Francia*, *Phrangia*).¹¹ In contrast, Constantine VII sharply

criticizes his father-in-law Romanos I for sending Maria Lekapena to marry Peter of Bulgaria.

As ruler Constantine VII himself used this special pleading to justify the choice of a Frankish bride for his son Romanos II. In 944 the six-year-old Bertha, daughter of Hugh of Arles, was betrothed to Romanos with the properly Greek name of Eudokia. There seems little doubt that she would have become empress had she not died five years later, before the marriage could be celebrated and consummated. Constantine VII then negotiated an agreement with Hedwig of Bavaria, niece of Otto I, which never came to fruition. In due course Romanos was married to a Byzantine bride, another Theophano, not the subject of this chapter.¹²

Even though the alliance with Otto I had come to nothing, the same Western ruler later sent Liutprand, bishop of Cremona, with a similar mission, to find a bride for his son. He had in mind Romanos II's daughter, Anna, a true *porphyrogenetos*. This was the embassy of 968, so coldly received by Nikephoros Phokas, to Liutprand's great displeasure.¹³ But his successor, John Tzimiskes, who reigned from 969 to 976, was willing to comply with the request, which is where our Theophano comes in.

Before turning to Theophano, however, it is necessary to follow Anna's ultimate fate, as this illustrates one important development of tenth-century diplomatic practice. After Romanos II had rejected Otto I's request, it was the turn of Hugh Capet of France, who wanted Anna as a bride for his son, Robert.¹⁴ In fact, Gerbert's letter about the proposal, though written, was never sent because in the meantime Hugh had learned that the ruling emperor, Basil II, had promised his sister to Vladimir of Kiev. After Russian assistance to Basil during the civil war, Anna was sent to Kiev in the summer of 988. Her large retinue included bishop Theophylaktos, appointed as the first metropolitan of the capital of the Rus'. Anna herself undertook an evangelizing role there and was responsible for building many churches in the 990s.¹⁵ She may have been the mother of Boris and Gleb, later recognized as patron saints of Russia.

So in Anna's case we know that this particular Byzantine princess had been courted before, that is, she was an established prize, and exercised a truly ambassadorial role in Kiev. Although the marriage was forced upon Basil II, he managed to insist that Vladimir convert to Christianity. This preserved at least the notion that Byzantine princesses should never be married to pagan rulers, though the Christian faith was barely established in Russia at the time. But the break with tradition is perhaps reflected in Anna's initial unwillingness, recorded in the Russian sources.¹⁶ Subsequent alliances, however, regularly followed this new pattern, subordinating

Constantine VII's diplomatic principle to expediency.

From this brief overview it is clear that "Byzantine princesses" came in many guises. Still, certain characteristics were associated with the term itself and these must now be examined. In the first place, imperial women were obviously aware of the duties of princesses, and their role in court ceremonial. Those who had been participating as *porphyrogennetoi* since their youth had taken an active part in imperial functions; the more distantly related had less exposure to them and must have needed coaching.

Second, for those foreigners coming into the empire to marry the heir apparent, those who would become empress, a certain amount of education in Greek and introduction to Byzantine culture was required. This is evident from the training provided for Rotrud, Charlemagne's daughter, during the 780s when she was officially betrothed to Constantine VI. She was known in the East by the name Erythro, that is, a translation of her Germanic name, meaning red.¹⁷ Empress Irene sent a court official, Elissaios the eunuch, from Constantinople to the West to instruct Rotrud in the language and customs of her future husband. Had the marriage gone ahead, instead of being broken off, she would have been collected from the West and brought ceremonially to Byzantium for the arranged marriage, with at least a modicum of preparation for her new life.¹⁸ A similar attention is documented in the case of Čiček, the Khazar princess selected as the bride of Constantine V. Her name meant Flower (*Anthousa* in Greek) though she was renamed Irene (Peace) at her baptism in Byzantium. In connection with this preparation for imperial status, one iconophile source claims that Irene became eminent for her piety and condemned the iconoclasm of her husband and father-in-law.¹⁹ If so, this was a subversion of the marriage alliance, which had surely intended her to support her new family in every way. The name Anthousa was later used by the ruling family, but probably under the influence of St. Anthousa of Mantineon, who predicted the safe birth of twins to Eudokia, Constantine's third wife.²⁰

This basic training for Byzantine court life can also be observed in the proposed marriage of Romanos II to Hedwig of Bavaria and later matches.²¹ Again, Byzantine eunuchs were dispatched to give the bride instruction in Greek culture, probably oral and unwritten. The engagement came to nothing, however, and Hedwig later married Burchard II of Swabia. But in the mid-twelfth century this style of teaching prepared Bertha of Sulzbach for her marriage to Manuel I in 1142. Later Bertha not only acquired the necessary knowledge of Greek but also commissioned paraphrases of difficult ancient Greek texts, patronizing writers who used the vernacular or demotic (spoken) Greek of the time.²² It is difficult to judge whether such

patronage sprang from a desire to become more fully aware of the Byzantine literary heritage. But evidently the young empress gathered a group of scholars around her, including John Tzetzes, who prepared versions of the classics in a less daunting form. In her case the education required of a foreign-born imperial bride encouraged further learning.

Apart from some familiarity with Greek, all brides also had to acquire quite an extensive knowledge of court ceremonial. Although these rituals and traditions were written down in the *Book of Ceremonies*, documented at the insistence of Constantine VII in the middle of the tenth century, eunuch court officials had preserved them by word of mouth from generation to generation. It was probably in this verbal form that they were communicated to strangers to Byzantium, who had to learn how to participate in special receptions and dinners. Although the master of ceremonies gave constant spoken instructions during these long theatrical events, it was very important for everything to proceed according to tradition. The order, execution, and significance of each gesture, act, and acclamation had to be mastered by those taking part.²³

From the cases cited earlier it is evident that in the East instruction in both Greek and court ceremonial was considered an important element in the training of foreign brides. This training was entrusted to high-ranking officials, whose primary responsibility was to attend upon the emperor and empress in their private apartments, and to guard the women's quarters of the imperial palace.²⁴ Within the Byzantine court eunuchs formed a separate and quite distinct hierarchy, reserved for "beardless men," who were considered reliable with female members of the imperial family. Owing to their close proximity to the highest circles of the ruling class they often became trusted personal servants and confidants of emperors. As guardians of imperial tradition, they also played an active part in ensuring the smooth performance of palace ceremonial. Such officials were well qualified to communicate knowledge both of Greek and of Byzantine court procedures, and were regularly employed to do so.

At the highest level of the court, the empress was involved in an entire calendar of rites performed throughout the year as well as particular ceremonies adapted for special occasions. The Byzantine court required a female figurehead and entourage to balance the male hierarchy attending on the emperor, to receive the wives of visiting dignitaries, and to provide a female counterpart to specifically male ceremonies. The empress also directed and looked after the women's quarters in the palace, attending to the education of imperial children and to the household activities of what was a very large and important establishment.²⁵ Her presence at court was fundamental to Byzantine

protocol; even a female child might be crowned empress, in order that the position might be filled.²⁶

In the very last years of the ninth century, as his second wife died, Leo VI enunciated this principle in unmistakable fashion: “Not having an empress, it was impossible to celebrate the banquets according to the prescribed tradition and custom.”²⁷ He therefore crowned his daughter Anna as *auguste*, and she served in this capacity until his third marriage. On other occasions emperors took similar steps: for example, after the death of his wife, Theodora, Romanos I crowned his daughter-in-law Sophia as empress—she had been married to his son Christopher, and was the daughter of Niketas the Slav.²⁸ There were already other *augoustai* at court, Romanos’s own daughter Helen and his other daughter-in-law Anna, but he needed one who would perform the imperial role.

Why was the figure of the empress so vital? Certain ceremonies, including the complex banquets, could take place only with the empress present. Others involved the promotion of officials to positions in which their wives would also attain a new dignity. As an instance of the ceremonies in which the empress might participate, one could cite a great number of receptions described in the *Book of Ceremonies*, and I have chosen to analyze the reception of one foreign embassy, that of Olga, the Russian princess.²⁹

The Russian delegation met the emperor and empress twice, probably in the year 958. On the first occasion, 9 September, the ceremonial must have taken up the best part of a day. It began with the formal reception of Olga by Constantine VII and his court in the Magnaura Palace. Her noble female relations, her elite female attendants, the ambassadors and merchants from Russia, in short, her entire entourage was in attendance.

It continued in the Triclinium of Justinian, where the great throne of Theophilos was set up with another one on a platform covered with reddish purple silk. The empress (Helen) and her daughter-in-law (Theophano) received seven separate groups of court-wives; then Olga entered with her entourage and female attendants and talked with the empress, through the intermediary of the *praepositos*. Next, the emperor and empress and their children born in the purple had private conversations with Olga in the empress’s bedchamber.

Later the same day, the empress Helen gave a grand banquet in the Triclinium of Justinian for all the female Russians, while the emperor received the males in the Chrysotriclinium and distributed sums of money to each of them. Olga dined with the empress, who stood as godmother to her in her Constantinopolitan baptism and gave her the Christian name Helen. Olga stood beside the empress and the daughter-in-law, Theophano, on the raised platform, and in this

position she received reverence in the form of prostrations made by *archontissai* (wives of the leading men, *archontes*) who attended the banquet. Her own relations and wives of court officials also participated.

Afterward Olga took her place at a separate table with the *zostai*, according to the prescribed order. This means that she had been admitted to the rank of *zoste patrikia*, the highest court rank for women, marked by a costume with a particular girdle (*zoste*). Although one early Byzantine instance is recorded, this title in its medieval form was created by the emperor Theophilos for his mother-in-law Theoktiste in the ninth century.³⁰ Promotion to the rank of *zoste* involved a special ceremony documented from the *Book of Ceremonies* (though not mentioned here by Constantine VII). When Olga received this high honor, the empress hosted a special dinner for her as a female head-of-state after a court ceremony in which the imperial couple had acted together. At the banquet choristers from two major churches sang the imperial praises and theatrical dances were staged by the factions.

Finally, a dessert was served in the Aristeterion, and Olga sat with the emperors, Constantine VII and Romanos, with their children and with the daughter-in-law, Theophano. Constantine had five daughters (including a Theophano); Romanos and Theophano had only one child, Basil, later Basil II.³¹ On this occasion Olga was given 500 *miliaresia*, silver coins, in a golden bowl encrusted with precious stones. And her six relations and eighteen attendants received equivalent sums.

On the second occasion, 8 October, another banquet was given by the empress Helen for Olga in the Pentakouboukleion of St. Paul, while in the Chrysotriclinium the other Rus' dined with the emperor. Again the purple-born children and the imperial daughter-in-law Theophano attended, and the dinner was marked by the distribution of more coin to the princess, her female relations, and her ladies-in-waiting. In such receptions the younger generations of the imperial family performed their roles and observed what the reigning empress did under the guidance of the *atriklines* (master of ceremonies), who stage-managed such events. Similarly, the staff of each imperial lady's bedchamber and the wives of senators and other court officials in attendance participated in particular ways that had to be learned.

In these two receptions given for Olga, the empress Helen played a particularly important role precisely because the foreign embassy was headed by a woman. Her daughter-in-law, Theophano, aged about fifteen, was also present, an instance of the heir presumptive's wife "learning on the job." She had to observe and follow the whole ceremony, with her infant son Basil, the future emperor. The

participation of wives of officials is clear, and again their movements are complex and involve different parts of the Great Palace.³²

While this tenth-century ceremony may have been especially lavish, the participation of the empress in numerous public events was always required. During a reception for the envoys of the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba, one of them remarked on the beauty of the empress Theodora and the unusual fact of her being unveiled at court.³³ Similarly, Marwazi in his account of the imperial couple expressed amazement that the empress accompanied the emperor on campaign and attended particular games in the Hippodrome, when her men took on the emperor's in fights and competitions.³⁴ The military side of an empress's life is another regular aspect—like Martina in the seventh century, so Irene Doukaina went on campaign with her husband in the twelfth, though there were times in between when empresses did not.

By now it should be obvious that the prominence of the empress, her retinue, and the wives of senators at court ceremonies is modeled on the emperor's role. The feminine side constitutes an essential element. So any incoming princesses, whether of Byzantine or foreign origin, had to be instructed in their roles. They all needed to master a whole cycle of Byzantine traditions and court ceremonials in order to participate correctly. While this learning may have been of a purely unwritten sort that required only memorization, the symbolic significance of each ceremony was also important. Arguably, this aspect of court ritual was given special emphasis if the princess was being sent abroad as an ambassador of Byzantine culture.



To turn now to the other more formal aspect of their education, what do we know about their book learning? Did Byzantine princesses receive any training in reading and writing? Current scholarship on levels of literacy in Byzantine society at large is rather divided.³⁵ But there is general agreement that most women, the vast majority, were illiterate. Only in certain aristocratic households or nunneries could girls acquire a basic knowledge of reading and writing.³⁶ This may be illustrated by the *Life* of St. Theophano, who later became the pious empress and first wife of Leo VI. At the age of six her father got her a tutor so that she could learn Holy Scripture. Soon she knew the Psalter and hymns by heart and then she devoted herself to reading and prayer.³⁷ Deeply religious, she had no secular education deemed worthy of record by her hagiographer, but clearly she was literate and well educated in religious matters.

At court there may have been more emphasis on literacy, even for girls. And this was especially likely when no sons were born to an

imperial family. The education of Theophilos's daughters, five of whom were born before Michael, or of Constantine VII's, who similarly preceded Romanos, reveals an attention to their potential future roles.³⁸ If no male child were to be born to an imperial couple, the eldest girl would normally have played a crucial role as wife of the emperor-designate. This was the role assumed by Anna Komnene in the early twelfth century, even after the birth of her brother John. So the education and preparation of female children for an imperial role became accepted as a necessity. And since emperors died unexpectedly and were occasionally killed in battle, widowed empresses might yet wield considerable power. Several seem to have aspired to full imperial authority and regularly transmitted it to their chosen consorts.

Of course, at the court there was never a shortage of educated servants, who could act as *amanuensis* for emperors and empresses alike. But rulers and their families were occasionally famous for their literate skills. In the mid-tenth century an interesting example of such education is preserved in the story of Constantine VII's reliance on his daughter Agatha. When he fell ill she assisted him with chancellery work, not just as a secretary but because she understood it and was well informed about official governmental matters.³⁹ This is a rare reference to a Byzantine princess having a command of official state affairs and being allowed to exercise it. But it may be rare partly because our sources do not document such expertise except in most unusual circumstances. The fact that Agatha could help her father, who was one of the most intellectual and scholarly emperors, implies a greater scope for literacy among imperial daughters than is often supposed. It may also reflect this emperor's concern to educate his many daughters.

To meet the requirements of her high rank and to fulfill the duties of potential future positions, therefore, every Byzantine princess was expected to meet certain criteria. It was necessary for her to understand something of the ideology of empire, as this was represented in court ceremonial and diplomatic activity. She had to master not only her own place in the ceremonies that took up so much of the court's time, but also the roles performed by the others involved. While much of this training might be communicated orally and learned by imitation (and there are clear instances when a young princess would acquire such expertise by participating at the lower levels of the hierarchy), the reception of foreign embassies, the promotion of office-holders, attendance at special liturgies, or distribution of charity involved background knowledge about the diplomatic, political, ecclesiastical, and philanthropic considerations behind such functions. A princess who had the capacity to understand

more than the basics of reading and writing would have been encouraged to broaden and deepen that knowledge by studying the documents that preserved imperial traditions. The best teachers available would have been employed as tutors and the library of the Great Palace put at the disposal of children of both sexes. They might also receive a specific training in court protocol and etiquette from the palace eunuchs, who acted as guardians of ceremonial traditions.

A Byzantine princess might well have witnessed some of the emperor's business activities, the work of officials charged with executing imperial policy, or the reports of those who returned from military campaigns or commercial ventures abroad. Other less elevated activities within the palace could instruct a princess about the amount of time and energy required to maintain the furnishings, equipment, and official costumes used by the court. She might also observe the work of craftsmen, who constantly added to the luxury items displayed to impress visitors. So through a combination of regular participation in the calendar of events, attention to the symbolic values attached to ceremonies, and study of imperial political traditions, Byzantine princesses could become familiar with a wide spectrum of the ideological underpinnings of the empire. That they should do so was obviously desirable. When they failed to do so, male historians took pleasure in recording their "feminine weaknesses."

This pattern of training makes it possible to inquire into Theophano's education and preparation in a more informed and less personal fashion. To begin with, it is necessary to elucidate her background and the tenth-century world into which she was born.⁴⁰ Recent prosopographical work on the established dynastic families of the time has confirmed that she was the daughter of two high-born members of the aristocracy, Constantine Skleros and Sophia Phokas.⁴¹ Her mother was a niece of the emperor Nikephoros II Phokas, and she was thus his great-niece.⁴² It has also been suggested that she was a god-daughter of the empress Theophano, wife of Romanos II and Nikephoros Phokas in turn, and was brought up in the palace. In the West this association with the Great Palace of Constantinople, where the emperors held court, was known.⁴³

The most convincing aspect of this identification stems from the naming of Theophano's children: the first daughter was named after her paternal grandmother, Adelheid/Adelaide; the second after her maternal grandmother, Sophia; and the third after her paternal great-grandmother, Matilda. The fourth daughter, twin to Otto, died shortly after birth, but the logical name would have been that of her maternal great-grandmother Sophia's mother. The fact that Theophano and Otto named their children in precisely this fashion suggests that the correct

identification has been made.

As a member of the Phokas family, she had been close to ruling circles from a very young age (Nikephoros II reigned from 963 until 969). Her father, Constantine Skleros, was a firm ally of John Tzimiskes and would have ensured contact with the court after 969. It is, therefore, unnecessary to argue that she was named after Theophano, empress and wife of Romanos II, who acted as her godmother and brought her up in the court. In fact Theophano was quite a common name in the tenth century, particularly among the Macedonian dynasty, which produced a saint in the first wife of Leo VI, whose relics were treasured in the palace.

When Otto I sent Liutprand to Constantinople to seek a bride, Nikephoros II Phokas had no children: his wife Theophano had three by Romanos, real *porphyrogennetoi*, including a daughter, Anna, but the reigning emperor had no wish to permit a legitimate member of the previous ruling dynasty to crown an alliance. After his murder in 969 the widowed empress Theophano was banished with her children, and the new ruler, John Tzimiskes, married another Theodora, a daughter of Constantine VII. The situation was then as follows: the emperor had no children from his first marriage to Maria Skleraina; his second wife gave him a certain legitimacy but he had no children of his own.

However, his brother-in-law Constantine Skleros, who was married to Sophia Phokas, a great-niece of the previous emperor, had a daughter Theophano, a girl (*puella*) of the right age to marry Otto's son.⁴⁴ It is important to note that all the calculations about Theophano's date of birth and age at marriage turn on this fact. Otto II was born in 955 and thus was sixteen/seventeen years old in 972; his bride had to be of a suitable age. Following Wolf, the current consensus is that Theophano was about twelve years old—twelve was then the minimum age for a girl to marry.⁴⁵ The problem of a Byzantine bride had been outstanding since Nikephoros broke off negotiations, and John Tzimiskes wanted peace in Italy in order to concentrate on eastern and northern campaigns.

At this point we have to surmise what might have occurred, given that there is no direct evidence for the emperor's thinking. But it seems quite possible that he would have brought Theophano into the Great Palace in order to prepare her for her new role.⁴⁶ Her connection with the new dynasty provided her with imperial credentials as a Byzantine princess, and she was a blood-relative of the successful general who had become emperor. But she was not a *porphyrogennetos*, in the same way as Anna and Theodora, daughters of Romanos II. In this sense, Thietmar of Merseburg may have correctly recorded a certain disappointment, even outright hostility, because

Theophano was not the imperial daughter desired by Otto I, merely the emperor's niece.⁴⁷

For this is what the Western sources claim: Theophano was a most noble niece, *neptim clarissimam*, of John Tzimiskes.⁴⁸ In the *Vita Mahthildis reginae antiquior*, commissioned by Otto II, she is identified as follows: “augusti de palatio, regalis fuisset data coniunx praeclara dicta nomine Theophanu”⁴⁹ (“from the palace of the emperor, a most noble regal wife had been given, by name Theophano”). Moreover, the noble niece, who came from the imperial palace of Constantinople, appears to have been well schooled in the role of a real Byzantine princess.

As in all the other cases Theophano had to learn what was expected of a Byzantine princess who would be sent to serve as ambassador to a foreign country. In about two years' exposure to court life, she had to master the correct style of dress, deportment, and manners and to study the relevant language and culture of her future husband. If she had not been taught to read and write at home, she now had to acquire those literate skills she would need in her new role. This she clearly did with some success because in the West her expertise was appreciated as something typically Byzantine.⁵⁰

To her background is attributed her determination to reign as empress and later as regent for her son.⁵¹ This Byzantine practice had been exemplified by Theophano the Younger, whom Theophano may have known personally, and also by two famous empresses of the ninth and eighth centuries, Theodora and Irene. Both were celebrated in Byzantium as Orthodox rulers who insisted on restoring the veneration of icons after long periods of destruction. This iconophile tradition, commemorated in their *Lives*, ensured their prominence; Theodora was recognized as a saint of the Eastern Church. Through the premature deaths of their husbands, they had become de facto regents for their young sons, and ruled in the name of these minors. In Constantinople, however much court officials deplored the fact in private, it was sometimes unavoidable for women to be in control. As heads of state, even if only for brief periods, they wielded supreme authority and established an image of the female ruler that ran counter to the general seclusion of women. So it would hardly be surprising if Theophano had become familiar with stories of their personal rule at court.⁵²

In this context it is important to remember that young girls were expected to learn fast. Princesses must have matured quickly, under pressure, for they were expected to cope with important affairs of state, and clearly some of them did. They were married at the inception of puberty, and were expected to bear children as soon as possible. Theophano gave birth four times between November/

December 977 and June/July 980, the last being a delivery of twins (Otto III's twin sister died before 8 October 980), and she herself died "before her time" on 15 June 991. For her age Theophano seems even more remarkable than other ruling queens and empresses. And it seems very likely that some of her stamina and skill must be derived from her Byzantine background and training.

From her mature life in the West it is clear that Theophano had acquired in Constantinople a certain basic preparation for the role of a Byzantine princess, and conformed to an established model. Like others before her she had been exposed to developed cultural standards and traditions that set Byzantium apart from the West. These extended beyond the glamour of court ceremonial, official costume, and state occasions to some acquaintance with the Byzantine style of government: the rhetoric of universal authority used in every imperial document, methods of diplomacy, dispensation of justice, appointment of officials, reception of foreign delegations, and so on. It included familiarity with imperial responsibilities (of philanthropy, for instance) and with ecclesiastical practices, liturgy, festivals, and moral judgments. At the court, Theophano might have observed some aspects of tenth-century political life and her uncle's style of government, not least her own role in it. All this helped her to train her son and to establish patterns of government in her own territories in the West. Yet despite it all, she could still become identified with "luxury from Greece."⁵³

In the process of assimilation she was probably helped by her mother-in-law, Adelheid, and her sister-in-law, Matilda, who became her spiritual sister.⁵⁴ Among her entourage from Constantinople she must have had advisers who wanted to see her successfully perform the expected role of a Byzantine princess in the West. Although we know very little about the Greek servants who accompanied her, it is possible that they resembled those sent with Anna to Kiev. Theophano probably took her own priest; she certainly had her own ladies-in-waiting, who attended her at official ceremonies in the West. There must have been a whole team of assistants to look after her wardrobe, personal clothes, jewels, linens, rugs, and so on. Her appreciation of Byzantine silks is documented in the gifts she later made to Western churches; indeed, her marriage contract was even drawn up on parchment painted to resemble one of these imperial purple silks.⁵⁵ So Byzantine influences surrounded her as she sailed to Benevento, where she was met by bishop Dietrich of Metz, who escorted her to Rome.

All this finery was part of what made Byzantine princesses desirable and much sought after in the West.⁵⁶ Another crucial part was their standard of education and knowledge of imperial traditions. Despite her status as a close imperial relative rather than a purple-born

princess, Theophano appears to have executed the expected role with success. Judged by her adult life in the West she conformed to and embodied in her own way the archetypal character of a Byzantine princess. That she produced children, including a son and heir, is not exceptional. But she also undertook their education and supervised their learning in a thorough and masterful way. She brought distinction to the court of the Western emperor and inspired her son Otto III with visions beyond his father's ambitions. Had he not died at a young age, the history of Europe might have been changed. As it was Theophano ensured that his short life inspired others and introduced novel ideas into the West. In this respect she performed the task of Byzantine ambassador to an unprecedented degree. This was precisely what Otto I had wanted, and had he witnessed her activity he would probably have been well pleased.⁵⁷

NOTES

1. See the excellent survey in *Byzantine Diplomacy*, ed. Jonathan Shepard and Simon Franklin, Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies, Publications I (Aldershot, UK, 1992). **Update** S. Lampakis, M. Leontsini, T. Lounghis, and V. Vlysidou, *Byzantine Diplomacy: A Seminar* (Athens, 2007), esp. ch. 1, 17–82.

2. During revision of this chapter in May and June 1993, the marriage of the heir to Japan's Chrysanthemum Throne took place amid ceremonies that appeared to an outsider highly reminiscent of Byzantine court ritual. In some respects crown-princess Masako has to fulfill a role comparable to that in Byzantium of incoming foreign brides, who entered the imperial court to be trained as future empresses. This is different from Theophano, who represents rather the outgoing bride, leaving the empire to perform the role of princess in a new context. But both have had to conform to established roles in imperial courts. **Update** And the crown-princess seems to have suffered from this restriction, especially since the birth of a daughter rather than a son.

3. Literally, "born in the Purple (Chamber)" (the *Porphyra*), a birthing room that was evidently lined with porphyry (purple stone) or hung with purple silk. The term was transliterated as *porphyrogenitus/porphyrogenita* in the Latin West. **Update** See "Marriage: A Fundamental Element of Imperial Statecraft," [chapter 14](#) in this volume.

4. See, for instance, Ernest Gamillscheg, "Zoe und Theodora als Träger dynastischer Vorstellungen in den Geschichtsquellen ihrer Epoche," in A. von Euw and P. Schreiner, eds., *Kaiserin Theophanu: Begegnung des Ostens und Westens um die Wende des ersten Jahrhunderts*, Gedenkschrift des Kölner Schnütgen-Museums zum 1000. Todesjahr der Kaiserin, 2 vols. (Cologne, 1991), II, 397–401.

5. Shepard, "A Marriage Too Far?: Maria Lekapena and Peter of Bulgaria," in *The Empress Theophano*, ed. A. Davids (Cambridge, UK, 1995), 121–49.

6. *Theophanes*, AM 6281, 1, 463; cf. Eng. trans., Harry Turtledove, *The Chronicle of Theophanes* (Philadelphia, 1982), 147. **Update** See now the full and helpfully annotated translation by Cyril Mango and Roger Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997), 637–38.

7. For example, L. Rydén, "The Bride-shows at the Byzantine Court: History or

Fiction?," *Eranos* 83 (1985), 175–91. **Update** There is a considerable bibliography on the bride shows, which continue to divide historians. For a balanced view and survey, see Martha Vinson, "Romance and Reality in the Byzantine Bride Shows," in *Gender in the Early Medieval World, East and West, 300–900*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge, UK, 2004), 102–20; and on the function of these competitions, see "Unrivalled Influence: Mothers and Daughters in the Medieval Greek World," [chapter 4](#) in this volume.

8. W. Treadgold, "The Bride-shows of the Byzantine Emperors," *B* 49 (1979), 395–413; H. Hunger, "Die Schönheitskonkurrenz in 'Belthandros und Chrysantza' und die Brautschau am byzantinischen Kaiserhof," *B* 35 (1965), 150–58. L. M. Hans, "Der Kaiser als Märchenprinz: Brautschau und Heiratspolitik in Konstantinopel," *JÖB*, 38 (1988), 33–52, reemphasized the credibility of this method of "choosing" a suitable bride, citing the long tradition preserved in Hellenistic romances; cf. C. Cupane, "Il 'concorso di bellezza' in Beltrando e Crisanza sulla via fra Bisanzio e l'occidente medievale," *JÖB* 33 (1983), 221–48.

9. C. W. Previté Orton, "Charles, Count of Vienne," *EHR* 29 (1914), 703–6.

10. Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, *De administrando imperio*, ed. G. Moravcsik, with Eng. trans. by R.J.H. Jenkins, I (Budapest, 1949), 70–72; II, commentary (London, 1962), 63, 67. On this crucial text, see now R. Macrides, "Dynastic marriages and political kinship," in *Byzantine Diplomacy* (see note 1 earlier), 263–80, esp. 266–70.

11. J. Shepard, "Aspects of Byzantine Attitudes toward the West in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," *BF* 13 (1988), 67–118, esp. 87–94. **Update** J. Shepard, "Byzantium and the West," in *New Cambridge Medieval History*, ed. T. Reuter, vol. III (Cambridge, UK/New York, 1999), 605–23.

12. In ca. 955, when he was fourteen and she about the same age. From this fact it seems unlikely that the young prince, co-emperor with his father Constantine VII, had any freedom of choice in the matter. His bride was an internal candidate, who would need to be trained for her position. **Update** On Bertha, see Günter Prinzing, "Emperor Constantine VII and Margrave Berengar II of Ivrea under Suspicion of Murder: Circumstantial Evidence of a Plot against King Hugh's Children, Berta-Eudokia and Lothair (Lothar)," in *Centre and Periphery in the Age of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos*, ed. Niels Gaul (Oxford, 2012, forthcoming).

13. Liutprand of Cremona, *Legatio*, *MGH SRG in Us. Schol.* XLII (Hannover, 1839), 347–63; Eng. trans. F. A. Wright (London, 1930), reprinted with an introduction by J. J. Norwich (London, 1993), 177–210. **Update** On the negotiations, see *Byzantine Diplomacy: A Seminar* (as in note 1), 50–57, 137–38.

14. A. A. Vasiliev, "Hugh Capet of France and Byzantium," *DOP* 6 (1951), 227–51.

15. *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, trans. S. H. Cross and O. P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor (Cambridge, MA, 1953), 112; Macrides, "Dynastic Marriages" (see note 10), 273; cf. D. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth* (London, 1971), 253–58. **Update** See "Marriage: A Fundamental Element of Imperial Statecraft," [chapter 14](#) in this volume.

16. The fact that "all contemporary Byzantine writers are strangely silent" about the marriage (Obolensky, *ibid.*, 254) might be interpreted as disapproval of Basil II's break with imperial tradition. Yet since the same silence shrouds the marriage of Theophano to Otto II, it seems more likely to reflect an indifference among Byzantine chroniclers as to the fate of such princesses.

17. *Theopanes* (see note 6), AM 6274, 1, 455; Eng. trans. Turtledove, 141. **Update** Mango and Scott, 628.

18. See note 6 earlier.

19. *Theopanes*, AM 6224, I, 409–10; Eng. trans. Turtledove, 101; Mango and

Scott, 567; cf. Nikephoros Patriarch of Constantinople, *Short History*, ed. and trans. Cyril Mango, ch. 63, 130. Since Constantine was about twelve years old in 730, Çiçek-Irene must have been a young girl at the time of the marriage.

20. See Cyril Mango, "Saint Anthusa of Mantineon and the Family of Constantine V," *AB* 100 (1982), 401–9. I am grateful to Nick Constanas for discussions on these saints, who regularly get confused, and for allowing me to consult his translation of the brief *Vita* of Anthousa, the emperor's daughter, now published in A.-M. Talbot, ed., *Byzantine Defenders of the Faith: Eight Saint's Lives in English Translation* (Washington, DC, 1998).

21. On Hedwig of Bavaria, niece of Otto I, and the Byzantine embassy of 952, see W. Ohnsorge, "Drei *deperdita* der byzantinischen Kaiserkanzlei und die Frankenadressen im Zeremonienbuch des Konstantinos Porphyrogennetos," *BZ* 45 (1952), 320–39, at 325–26; cf. G. Wolf, "Die byzantinisch-abendländischen Heirats- und Verlobungspläne," *Archiv für Diplomatik* 37 (1991), 15–32. On the significance of eunuchs in such diplomatic activity, see M. McCormick, "Diplomacy and the Carolingian Encounter with Byzantium down to the Accession of Charles the Bald," *Eriugena: East and West*, Papers of the Eighth International Symposium of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenean Studies (Notre Dame, 1994), 15–48; and "Textes, images et iconoclasme dans le cadre des relations entre Byzance et l'Occident carolingien," *Testo e immagine nell'alto medioevo*, XLI Settimana di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo (Spoleto, 1994), 95–162.

22. E. Jeffreys, "The Comnenian Background to the 'Romans d'Antiquité,'" *B* 50 (1980), 455–86, esp. 472–74, repr. in *Popular Literature in Late Byzantium* (Variorum, 1983); cf. P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos 1147–80* (Cambridge, UK, 1992) on this marriage of 1146, 42–43.

23. On the formal aspect of the *Book of Ceremonies*, see my article, "Byzance: le palais et la ville," *B* 41(1991), 213–30, esp. 218. **Update** See the revised English version, "Byzantium: The Palace and the City," [chapter 7](#) in *Margins and Metropolis: Authority across the Byzantium Empire* (Princeton, 2013).

24. On eunuchs in Byzantium, see R. Guiland, "Les eunuques dans l'Empire byzantin," *Etudes Byzantines* 1 (1943), 196ff.; "Fonctions et dignités des eunuques," *ibid.*, 2 (1944), 185ff.; 3 (1945), 179ff.; "Etudes de titulature byzantine: les titres auliques réservés aux eunuques," *REB* 13 (1955), 50ff.; 14 (1956), 122ff.; "Etudes sur l'histoire administrative de Byzance: les titres auliques des eunuques," *B* 25/27 (1955/57), 649ff. Cf. K. M. Ringrose, "The Eunuchs of Byzantium: Language, Image and Gender," unpublished paper. **Update** The study of eunuchs has been deepened by her study, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago, 2003); cf. Shaun Tougher, *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond* (London, 2002); and Liz James, "Men, Women, Eunuchs: Gender, Sex and Power," in *The Social History of Byzantium*, ed. John Haldon (Oxford, 2009), 31–50.

25. See most recently D. Missiou, "Über die institutionelle Rolle der byzantinischen Kaiserin," *JÖB* 32, no. 5 (1982), 489–98; S. Mashev, "Die staatsrechtliche Stellung der byzantinischen Kaiserinnen," *BS* 27 (1966), 308–43. **Update** See also "The Many Empresses of the Byzantine Court (and All Their Attendants)," [chapter 10](#) in this volume.

26. Emperor Herakleios, for instance, elevated his fifteen-month-old daughter, Epiphaneia, to the role of empress on 4 October 612; see *Chronicon paschale*, ed. L. Dindorf, *CSHB* (Bonn, 1832), 702; trans. Michael Whitby and Mary Whitby (Liverpool, 1989), 154. On the titles of the empress, see E. Bensammar, "La titulature de l'impératrice et sa signification: recherches sur les sources byzantines de la fin du VIII^e à la fin du XII^e siècle," *B* 46 (1976), 243–91.

27. Ohnsorge, "Drei *deperdita*" (see note 21), 325–26.

28. Theophanes Continuatus, *CSHB* (Bonn, 1828), 402; cf. S. Runciman, *The*

Emperor Romanus Lecapenus and His Reign (Cambridge, UK, 1929; repr. 1963), 67.

29. *DC*, bk. 2, ch. 15, ed. I. Bekker, *CSHB*, I, 594–98; trans. J. Featherstone, “Olga’s Visit to Constantinople,” in *Adelphotes: A Tribute to Omeljan Pritsak by His Students*, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 14 (1990), 293–312. The passage occurs in the chapter on receptions held in the Great Triclinium of the Magnaura, when the emperors sit on the throne of Solomon. It follows receptions for the emir of Tarsos (946), who sent an embassy seeking the exchange of prisoners and a peace treaty; the Hippodrome celebration organized by the demes to celebrate the peace; and the reception for the emir of Amida, at which the Arabs of Tarsos are described as friends. **Update** For the most recent analysis of the disputed date, see M. Featherstone, “Olga’s Visit to Constantinople in *De Cerimoniis*,” *REB* 61 (2003), 241–51.

30. R. Guillard, “Contribution à l’histoire administrative de l’Empire byzantin: la patricienne à la ceinture, *e zoste patrikia*,” *BS* 32 (1971), 269–75, reprinted in *Titres et fonctions de l’Empire byzantin* (London, 1976), pt. XXVI; cf. P.G. Sayre, “The Mistress of the Robes: Who Was She?,” *Byzantine Studies/Etudes Byzantines* 13 (1986), 229–39, who omits Olga from the list of women who held the title. **Update** For a fuller list of *zostai*, see now Jean-Claude Cheynet, “La patricienne à ceinture. Une femme de qualité,” in Cheynet, *La société byzantine: L’apport des sceaux*, vol. 1 (Paris, 2008), 163–73, including a seal of Theoktiste, mother of the empress (that is, Theodora) and of several foreign princesses brought to Constantinople and invested with this high honor, such as Koussousa of Armenian Vaspourakan and Maria of Bulgaria.

31. Basil was one year old when Constantine VII died in 959, so he must have been born in 958, but curiously the precise date is not recorded; see *DOC*, III, 2, 574.

32. See, for instance, the evidence cited by Guillard, “Contribution” (see note 30).

33. W. Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival 780–842* (Stanford, CA, 1988), 322. **Update** Juan Signes Codoñer, “Diplomatie und Propaganda im 9. Jahrhundert. Die Gesandtschaft des Al-Ghazal nach Konstantinopel,” in *Novum Millennium: Studies on Byzantine History and Culture Dedicated to Paul Speck*, ed. Claudia Sode and Sarota Takács (Aldershot, UK, 2001), 379–92.

34. V. Minorsky, “Marwazi on the Byzantines,” *Mélanges H. Grégoire*, II (Brussels, 1950), 1–69.

35. R. Browning, “Literacy in the Byzantine World,” *BMGS* 4 (1978), 39–54 (a rather optimistic view); cf. A. Laiou, “The Role of Women in Byzantine Society,” *JÖB* 31 (1981), 233–60, esp. 254 (stressing female illiteracy). See most recently, M. Mullett, “Writing in Early Medieval Byzantium,” in *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. R. McKitterick (Cambridge, UK, 1990), 156–85, esp. 156–57 (with an emphasis on the dominant oral traditions in Byzantium). **Update** Catherine Holmes and Judith Waring, eds., *Literacy, Education and Manuscript Transmission in Byzantium and Beyond* (Leiden, 2002), 17–24, 152–59, 174.

36. See, for example, E. C. Topping, “Women Hymnographers in Byzantium,” *Diptycha* 3 (1982–83), 98–111. Three particularly impressive women authors, Theodosia, Thekla, and Kassia, who all lived in the ninth century, possessed erudition, *logia*, that is, greater skill than mere literacy and piety, which is attributed to their aristocratic backgrounds and home education. **Update** Anna M. Silvas, “Kassia the Nun ca. 810–ca. 865: An Appreciation,” in *Women in Byzantium: Varieties of Experience 800–1200*, ed. Lynda Garland (Aldershot, UK, 2006), 17–39.

37. *Zwei Griechische Texte über die HI. Theophano, die Gemahlin Kaisers Leo VI.*, ed. E. Kurtz, *Zapiski imperatorskoj Akademii Nauk*, VIII, istor.-filol. otdel. III, 2 (St. Petersburg, 1898), 6, 3.

38. Psellos, however, accuses Basil II and Constantine VIII of ignoring the needs

of their three female heirs (daughters of the latter). The eldest, Eudokia, followed the religious calling and was dedicated to the church. Zoe and Theodora were neither prepared for the role of ruler nor suitably married, although they received their education in the palace; see *Chronographia*, bk. 2, 4–5, ed. E. Renauld (Paris, 1967), 1, 27–28; cf. Michael Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, trans. E.R.A. Sewter (London, 1953; repr. 1979), 55–56. **Update** Thekla, the eldest daughter of Theophilos and Theodora, featured on the coinage; see [figure 9](#) in this volume.

39. U. V. Bosch, “Einige Bemerkungen zum Kanzleiwesen der byzantinischen Kaiserin,” *Rivista di Studi Slavi e Bizantini*, I (Paris, 1979) = *Mélanges I. Dujčev*, 83–102. In the late eleventh century, Anna Dalassene, mother of Alexios I Komnenos, provides a different example: as an older woman and a widow she exercised considerable authority, which was made explicit when her son established her as regent in his absence.

40. On the Byzantine background in general, see P. Schreiner, “Die byzantinische Geisteswelt vom 9. bis zum 11. Jahrhundert,” in von Euw and Schreiner, *Kaiserin Theophanu*, 1, 9–24; R. Jenkins, *Byzantium: The Imperial Centuries AD 610–1071* (London, 1966), 256–300. For the most useful survey of what can be said about the early life of Theophanu, see F. Tinnefeld, “Die Braut aus Byzanz: Fragen zu Theophanos Umfeld und Gesellschaftlicher Stellung vor ihrer abendländischen Heirat,” in *Kaiserin Theophanu, Prinzessin aus der Fremde—des Westreichs Grosse Kaiserin*, ed. G. Wolf (Cologne, 1991), 247–61. **Update** See also Lounghis, in *Byzantine Diplomacy* (as in note 1 earlier), 50–57.

41. G. Wolf, “Nochmals zur Frage: Wer war Theophanu?,” *BZ* 81 (1988), 272–83 (with much earlier bibliography on this developed subject); Wolf, “Die ‘Grosse Frage’: Wer war Theophanu?,” in *Kaiserin Theophanu*, ed. Wolf, 223–36; cf. O. Kresten, “Byzantinische Epilegomena zur Frage: Wer war Theophanu?,” in von Euw and Schreiner, *Kaiserin Theophanu*, II, 403–10.

42. On the Phokas family, see I. Djuric, “Porodica Foka,” *ZRVI* 17 (1976), 189–296 (family tree, 292, French résumé, 293–96); cf. J.-C. Cheynet, “Les Phocas,” app. to *Le Traité sur la Guérilla (De Velitatione) de l’empereur Nicéphore Phocas*, ed. G. Dagron and H. Mihăescu (Paris, 1986), 289–315. On the Skleros side, see W. Seibt, *Die Skleroi: eine prosopographisch-sigillographische Studie*, *Byzantina Vindobonensia* 9 (Vienna, 1976). None of these studies, however, notes the possible offspring of the marriage of Sophia and Constantine. In contrast, the novelist Henry Benrath had very accurately worked out this genealogy in the 1930s, as emphasized by G. Wolf (“Nochmals zur Frage,” 279) and O. Kresten (“Byzantinische Epilegomena,” 403).

43. The theory of her being named after the empress Theophano the Elder was developed by P. Schramm and accepted as possible by Wolf (“Nochmals zur Frage,” 276). On the connection with the palace, see *Vita Mahthildis reginae antiquior*, 16, *MGH Scriptores* X (Hanover, 1852), 581. The attempt to identify a particular part of the palace, or even a different palace in Constantinople seems to me impossibly ambitious; see G. Wolf, “Vom Kaiserpalast in Byzanz zum Valkhof in Nimwegen,” *Kaiserin Theophanu*, ed. Wolf (see note 40), 19–26, esp. 22–23.

44. She is so identified by a contemporary Western author, Widukind of Corvey; see *Res gestae Saxonicae, Continuatio*, 74, *MGH Scriptores* III, 465 (cf. *ibid.*, 71). The term *puella* could be used of quite a wide range in age. So from this reference it is only possible to deduce that the bride and groom were considered well matched, that is, Theophanu may have been about the same age as Otto.

45. Wolf, “Nochmals zur Frage” (see note 41), 273. The other pointer to Theophanu’s youth is derived from the birth of her first child in 977. From the five-year gap between marriage and delivery some historians have deduced that she was even younger than twelve in 972 and could not have conceived prior to 976, when she would have reached puberty.

46. Tinnefeld, “Die Braut aus Byzanz” (see note 40), rightly emphasizes that the participation of young girls is not mentioned in court-ceremonies recorded in the *Book of Ceremonies*, and that they were normally kept at home secluded from public view (257). He concludes that Theophano may have witnessed just one ceremonial event put on for her uncle, the emperor, namely, the triumph he celebrated through the city of Constantinople in 971 (258). But he overlooks the fact that newly established rulers regularly invited their close relatives into the palace, and individuals appointed to high court-offices such as *kouropalates* and *logothetes tou dromou*, positions held by Theophano’s grandfather, could gain access. While there is no direct evidence that Theophano and her parents shared in the good fortune of John Tzimiskes, it is quite likely that they moved into the Great Palace at his request and that Theophano witnessed imperial procedure and court-ceremonies as one of the many ladies-in-waiting who attended all high-ranking female office-holders.

47. Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon*, II, 15, ed. R. Holtzmann, *MGH SRG*, 2nd ed. (Berlin, 1935), 56; Eng. trans. D. Warner, *The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg* (Manchester, 2001).

48. *MGH Diplomata, Die Urkunden Ottos II*, ed. Th. Sickel (Hanover, 1884), no. 21, 28–30, esp. 29. This is the bridegroom’s wedding contract, listing the gifts equivalent to Theophano’s dowry, drawn up by Otto II in Rome and dated 14 April 972 (on the day of the marriage). **Update** Anthony Cutler and William North, “‘Word over Image’: On the Making, Uses and Destiny of the Marriage Charter of Otto II and Theophano,” in *Interactions: Artistic Interchange between the Eastern and Western Worlds*, ed. C. Hourihane (Princeton, 2007), 167–87.

49. *Vita Mahthildis* (see note 43), 16, 581, lines 44–46.

50. K. N. Ciggaar, “The Empress Theophano (972–991): Political and Cultural Implications of Her Presence in Western Europe for the Low Countries, in Particular for the County of Holland,” in *Byzantium and the Low Countries in the Tenth Century: Aspects of Art and History in the Ottonian Era* (Hernen, 1985), 33–76; cf. J. Fleckenstein, “Hofkapelle und Kanzlei unter der Kaiserin Theophanu,” in von Euw and Schreiner, *Kaiserin Theophanu*, II, 305–10. **Update** Byzantium maintained the Roman tradition that an imperial bride could transform a barbarian court, as Jinty Nelson puts it: “a Roman-educated bride was represented as a one-woman civilizing process” see “Gendering Courts in the Early Medieval West,” in *Gender in the Early Medieval World, East and West, 300–900*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge, UK, 2004), 185–97, esp. 186, 196–97.

51. Ciggaar, *The Empress Theophano*, esp. 35–37; but note the developed Western tradition of widowed mothers acting as regent, as documented by F.-R. Erkens, “Die Frau als Herrscherin in ottonisch-frühalsalischer Zeit,” in von Euw and Schreiner, *Kaiserin Theophanu*, II, 245–59 (and articles by J. Laudage and C. Althoff, in the same volume); R. McKitterick, “Ottonian Intellectual Culture in the Tenth Century and the Role of Theophano,” in *The Empress Theophano*, as earlier, 169–93.

52. In this context, Theophano’s use of the male form of the term for emperor, “Theophanius imperator,” as well as the more familiar “imperatrix,” empress, might suggest a parallel with Irene, who signed her documents as emperor, *basileus*, rather than empress, *basilissa*; see most recently Ciggaar, *The Empress Theophano* (see note 50), 36, n. 17. **Update** For an alternative interpretation of the male title, see “Political Power and Christian Faith: The Case of Irene (Regent 780–90, Emperor 797–802),” [chapter 8](#) in this volume.

53. See Thangmar, *Vita beati Bernwardi episcopi et confessoris*, *MGH SS IV* (Hanover, 1841), add., 888, describing a vision, in which Theophano appeared mourning the vanities that she had introduced to Germany and France, which seduced many women. These are identified as “superflua et luxuriosa mulierum ornamenta quibus Grecia uti solet.” Cf. W. Georgi, “Ottonianum und Heiratsurkunde

962/972,” in von Euw and Schreiner, *Kaiserin Theophanu*, II, 135–60, esp. 159–60.

54. McKitterick, “Ottonian Intellectual Culture,” 184, in *The Empress Theophano*, ed. Davids, 169–93.

55. See W. Georgi, “Ottonianum” (see note 53).

56. It is also this association that traditionally connected Theophano and her dowry with a number of deluxe objects found in Western cathedral treasuries and collections. **Update** See now H. Westermann-Angerhausen, “Did Theophano Leave Her Mark on the Ottonian Sumptuary Arts?,” in *The Empress Theophano*, ed. Davids, 244–64. **Update** See the fascinating study by E. Jane Burns of the associations generated by silks, which often traveled very far from their place of production, *Sea of Silk: A Textile Geography Of Women’s Work In Medieval French Literature* (Philadelphia, 2009).

57. I would like to thank Dr Arnoud-Jan Bijsteveld for his helpful discussion and careful reading of the text, which permitted the correction of several errors. Any that remain are mine alone.

TOLERATION AND REPRESSION WITHIN THE BYZANTINE FAMILY

GENDER PROBLEMS



Leonidas Mauromates was a distinguished Byzantinist who conceived an ambitious plan to compare medieval families, and in the late 1990s planned a conference in Athens to survey the material. Since comparative history had always been a necessary part of my approach, I readily agreed to participate although the topic he gave me was challenging. The conference raised more problems than it resolved, which was a positive outcome, and the publication in 2002 presented many surprising and exciting comparisons.

In preparing this chapter I found the most compelling evidence in stories of the saints, whose families provided a wealth of information. Even if the authors of these stories wrote with very specific purposes, there was an abundance of background detail, not essential to the saint's life, that documented relations between parents and children. Some holy men and women had married and had children of their own before they adopted the ascetic celibate life. Others had dedicated themselves to the spiritual life from youth and experienced family connections only through their disciples, followers, and adopted, spiritual children. In many cases this dedication involved a break from the natal family that was resented by the parents. The "repressive" acts of fathers, who expected grandchildren to continue the family, could be contrasted with the "toleration" sometimes more clearly expressed by mothers, who accepted the nonproductive role of their ascetic offspring. Clearly, gender issues were at work in this presentation of alternatives.

The collections of stories considered spiritually beneficial for the soul contained especially revealing details in otherwise quite incredible narratives. Since the aim of such tales was to inspire hearers to greater Christian commitment and dedication, marvelous and dramatic coincidences predominated, which is why they were told over and over again, with additional details and embellishments. Accounts of women who had disguised themselves as men without beards (eunuchs) and entered monastic communities of men were among the most popular, and were translated into many languages, not least Anglo-Saxon. What effect did they have on audiences of young girls? Did they inspire a longing to emulate, or a horror of such transformation? In Anglo-Saxon England there was no Egyptian or Syrian desert, and eunuchs were almost unknown, but powerful abbesses occasionally ran double monasteries and had authority over monks as well as nuns.

It was also interesting to observe how many references to eunuchs and slaves occurred, not as necessary features of the narrative but as passing remarks, information let slip rather than carefully constructed to enhance a particular reading. Despite the deceptive nature of many hagiographies, they preserved a rich

content for historians willing to read against the grain and around the intention of male authors who created them.

IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FAMILY, tolerance and repression seem to be concepts which barely apply before our own times. Issues of child abuse and wife beating are probably universal, but they have not been identified as suppressive and intolerable until quite recently. The individual human rights of women and children have only slowly been recognized, over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and there is no way we can project such notions back into the medieval past. Although the Byzantine understanding of family and gender is quite unlike ours, it is nonetheless interesting to reflect upon toleration and repression from a modern point of view.

There are several comparative methods of approach. In this area Michael Walzer provides a very useful study of the type of toleration generated by multinational empires, ancient and modern (although he omits Byzantium altogether).¹ He also draws attention to the importance of cosmopolitan capital cities like Alexandria in Hellenistic times, which provided a “liberal center for misfits” (14–17), and cites the Ottoman millet system as another version of the autocratic but tolerant imperial regime, which subjects its basic minority communities to certain restrictions and allows them considerable powers of self-government (17–18).² These features have an echo in the Byzantine experience of empire, especially in its capital city, Constantinople, which accepted the existence of foreigners, sheltered a number of refugee communities, and attracted a vast number of outsiders who sought employment and traded in the great metropolis.

Additional models of social toleration, which extend into families and are particularly related to marriages between people of different ethnic, social, or religious groups, are revealed by David Nirenberg’s recent study of late medieval Spain.³ In his *Communities of Violence*, miscegenation is a major concern. Drawing attention to the rituals of intercommunal violence, he demonstrates that regular annual attacks by Christians on Jews, however aggressive, nonetheless ensured them an established place. Some of these outsider groups flourished right through the medieval period in close proximity to both Christians and Muslims. Yet Byzantium is not a comparable society marked by clear boundaries between communities, except possibly the Jews. And as the publication *Oi Perithoriakoi sto Vyzantio* shows, groups of outsiders are not blocked out of Byzantine narratives.⁴ On the contrary, the duty of a true Byzantine *philochristos*, lover of Christ, is to do good works among them: to wash those with leprosy, to create opportunities for prostitutes to give up their wicked ways and lead a decent monastic life, to establish regular distributions of charity to the poor through

philanthropic foundations. This suggests quite a significant contrast with studies of outsiders in the West, where such groups have been identified as a factor in the development of a persecuting society.⁵

Another theoretical aspect that proves helpful is Guy Stroumsa's notion of the internalization of identity created by the early Christians: he argues that by internalizing their Christian character, they were able to forget the arguments in favor of toleration that they themselves had put forward in the second century. When they no longer needed such arguments, religious freedom shrank as the now successful state religion became more aggressive. Saint Augustine discovered the inner man as Roman intellectuals defensively employed the same case against intolerance that had once been used by the Christians.⁶ This notion of confidence may also be applied to social roles: the internalization of specific gendered roles by male and female children. If women are expected from an early age to adapt themselves to service, sacrifice, care and attention to others, while boys are trained specifically to be active breadwinners, then there's a much greater expectation of conformity to gendered roles, based in the family.

In addition toleration is a concept closely related to conformity, to which the late and greatly lamented Hans-Georg Beck devoted lucid and pertinent analysis. Tackling issues of personal style, such as male hair-styles, and social practice (men and women going to the baths together, for instance), he explored the question of Byzantine nonconformity and showed how it opened the way to what was usually identified as heresy, rather than anti-social behavior.⁷ This tendency to view nonconformity as ecclesiastical deviance was characteristic of Byzantine civilization, so deeply embedded in traditions, inherited patterns of belief and behavior. Under this overarching interpretation by church lawyers, bishops, and monks, conformity could be understood as "political orthodoxy": meeting the outward demands of church and state whatever the individual's personal and inner convictions.

Beck thus reduced many issues of opposition and nonconformity to challenges to the authority of the emperor and patriarch, who together established the basic framework within which the Byzantines had to live. And in many centuries of Byzantium this does seem to have been the way in which the authorities established the standards to which everyone was expected to conform. Under the direction of Dieter Simon, Byzantine legal historians recently devoted a conference to the topic of Religious Deviance, which examined social, legal, and theological reactions to non-conformity in both East and West with most fruitful results.⁸ But neither Beck's concept of "political orthodoxy" nor Simon's concern with "deviance" is of much assistance

in the investigation of family and gender matters. On these particular issues, it is more helpful to turn to the analysis of Western medieval historians studying the richer Latin sources.

There is a vast bibliography on household and family in the medieval West, much of it related to the seminal research of David Herlihy and Christine Klapisch-Zuber, who have established authoritative methods of analysis for census returns with much fuller documentation than that available to Byzantinists.⁹ This provided a model for the computerization of Athonite material undertaken by Angeliki Laiou, which advanced the study of the Byzantine household in exciting new ways.¹⁰ These pioneering works inspired the Dumbarton Oaks Symposium on the Byzantine family and household held in 1989. But the subsequent publication included only two papers directly concerned with the formation of the household and its functions: Hammel's imaginary and mathematical model designed to calculate demographic constraints on the formation of the traditional Balkan household, *zadruga*; and Litavrin's paper on the *praktikon* of 1073 and what it reveals about family relations and family law in the Byzantine countryside during the eleventh century.¹¹ Neither helps very much in establishing a methodology of analysis, any more than the machine-driven number-crunching, generated by the passion for statistical history. This approach cannot tell us very much about relations within the family, let alone toleration and repression.

Laiou's subsequent work on the legal sources relative to marriage, however, has provided the clearest guidance to date in this field. In particular, her article "L'institution familiale en Epire" exploits the records of practical case law handed down by John Apokaukos and Demetrios Chomatenos to elucidate what actually occurred in marriages of the thirteenth century.¹² More recently her study of the role of coercion in marriage forms an important contribution to the debate on rape and forced marriage; it documents more fully than other studies the pressures on children and widows to conserve and consolidate family wealth through marriage.¹³

Using a different avenue of approach Paul Magdalino has recently revised and extended what Browning noticed about enlightenment and repression in the twelfth century, an important advance because it brings in the comparative aspect to which this conference is dedicated.¹⁴ It is essentially concerned with the levels of toleration set by the church and thus links repression to the dangers of heresy, particularly noticeable after the trial of John Italos. This work has emphasized both a more flexible attitude to interfaith marriages from the mid-twelfth century, and a continuing misogynistic practice, which led women wrongly denounced for adultery straight back into the monastic imprisonment suffered by their predecessors.¹⁵ There

appear to be relatively settled attitudes to the repression of women that remain constant throughout Byzantine history. And this suggests that structural factors within the establishment of families permitted and even encouraged such continuities.

The basic problem of studying modern concepts such as toleration and repression in the Byzantine context may then be one of definition: what levels of toleration constitute approval of nonconformity? What levels of repression constitute punishment for nonconformity? And in any discussion of the family, what constitutes conformity? Is there such a thing as a “normal” Byzantine family with an established standard of behavior, which is socially, politically, economically, culturally acceptable, and from which others deviate? Such rhetorical questions invite a generally negative response: it is impossible to define Byzantine “norms.” Of course both state and church have a clear framework for a legal definition of what constitutes deviance, dissidence, heresy, sedition, rebellion. In the same way, the church can define the suitable punishment for unacceptable behavior, and this varies depending on the gender of the offender: adultery by a man with a slave is quite different from adultery by a woman with a slave—and of course the partner involved also plays a determining role.

My investigation will first survey the framework of patriarchy inherited from Late Antiquity and then propose several areas of research. Within the household and family, any attempt to study toleration and repression has to be considered under the omnipotent authority of the *pater familias*. How does this power repress different family members? Do any of them manage to subvert this authority? In hagiographical sources in particular women appear trying to circumvent the *patria potestas*, especially when it has condemned them to a life they do not wish to lead. Is this more frequently imagined than put into effect? The problematic nature of these stories requires careful textual analysis. Nonetheless, all types of sources concur in the critical power of fathers to decide how the other members of the family shall behave in order to maintain and expand family wealth and resources through strategic marriage alliances. At many stages of the life cycle, both of teenagers and of older women, decisions are taken to prevent some members marrying at all (entry to a monastery with associated renunciation of sexual activity; castration with associated inability to procreate) or through the foundation of pious houses/charitable institutions in which the entire family will end its days—converting the family home to a monastery, or setting aside the bulk of family wealth and property for the benefit of the poor (as in the *Vita* of St. Theodore of the Stoudios). There can be no doubt as to the dominant role of the father in most Byzantine families.

Yet female heads of household are common enough and the law

protects the inheritance of women. Their participation in social activity as individuals is indicated by the Theban confraternity records: of five women named as participants in the icon cult of the Virgin Naupaktitissa, only one is identified by her husband.¹⁶ In his analysis of the 1073 *praktikon*, Litavrin calculated that one-quarter of the total number of households were headed by women, twelve widows and one single woman (out of fifty-one households, twenty-eight were held by conjugal couples, to which a widow would also have the right of inheritance).¹⁷ But he also observed that these households were among the poorest. And he stressed that perhaps as many as half of the total female population was simply not listed. This under-recording of women in census returns is common to most medieval documentation, and makes the analysis of family relations particularly difficult.¹⁸ Clearly, husbands often died before their wives, who maintained a similar control over the household on their own.

In the attempt to isolate some general features of patriarchal authority within the family drawn from the Middle Byzantine period (late sixth to the thirteenth century), I will concentrate not on the legal provisions available but the applied version in enacted relations. Let me just single out the key features in the control of marriage. First, both young girls and boys are betrothed to create alliances between families. Second, sometimes a child is dedicated to the religious life, possibly because the family cannot afford a decent dowry for the daughter, or the child suffers from some disfiguring disease or a physical problem that would make child-bearing unlikely.¹⁹ A third possibility is that the child is required to follow a professional training. If the father works in a trade for which he must provide an heir, one of his sons must take on the work, whether this is baking, leatherwork, or military service. And if there are no sons, a daughter may undertake the role via an intermediary if not in person, or a substitute may be adopted to perform the task; spiritual kinship permits such solutions. The adoption of heirs, explicitly linked to care in old age, and the adoption of poor orphans as an act of Christian charity, both reveal procedures to extend the natural family more broadly than might be expected.²⁰ In the case of prostitution, families with experience of this activity seem to have used both boys and girls to carry on the trade. While the procurement of children for this purpose is prohibited by law, the sale of children by parents too poor to raise them is recognized, and if the parents forced by poverty to part with their offspring later find the means to repurchase them, legal provisions encourage their repurchase.²¹

Such regulations suggest a fourth possibility, that children might be sold in the same way as slaves, who were frequently purchased when young. Such slaves are not always identified by ethnic origin as

coming from beyond the borders of the empire, though this is often the case (for example, the “Scythian” child purchased in the Peloponnese, or the “Scythian” slave acquired in Constantinople).²² But there is no indication that the child purchased by a monk in Calabria was not of local origin.²³ Obviously it is a *topos* of Christian writings to adopt an enslaved child or purchase one offered for sale in the market, and then endow him/her with education so that some good comes out of the process.

An important alternative to marriage that also comes under paternal control concerns enforced celibacy: the father may decide to advance the family’s fortunes by having one of his younger sons castrated, to create a eunuch who will make a career at court, in the church, or in personal service. There are numerous examples of the success of this strategy (for instance, the youngest son of Romanos Lekapenos, later Patriarch Euthymios). Whether it constitutes a repressive act or not, it is performed at the father’s orders and deprives the child of a normal adult male life.²⁴ The account of Paphlagonians furthering family wealth in this fashion suggests it had a vogue in the mid-tenth century, a time when eunuchs were in high demand not only in imperial service but also in many aristocratic households.²⁵

The motivation behind this form of castration is clearly quite different from the political one, which is to incapacitate rivals and their children, a procedure well documented in other societies as well as Byzantium. As a form of punishment it is used to prevent those with imperial claims from engendering offspring who might sustain their title to rule, for example, Basil, son of Lekapenos, later *parakoimomenos*, or the sons of Michael I or Leo V. On the penal scale of mutilation that becomes an additional element in Byzantine law during the eighth century, blinding, castration, and tonsure represent forms of bodily marking that nonetheless permit the individual to survive. Castration is often associated with involuntary tonsure, similarly used to debar men from imperial roles, for example, the sons of Constantine V, half-brothers of Leo IV, who were tonsured and eventually blinded to make sure that they no longer plotted against Constantine VI and Irene, the legitimate rulers. In the West, where eunuchism is generally viewed with disgust, it was used to prevent illicit sexual activity, for example Peter Abelard’s.²⁶

But in Byzantium the existence of a whole range of official positions reserved to unbearded men indicates a continuous appreciation of and demand for eunuchs, which was met both by imported and by locally produced candidates. This was understood by Liutprand of Cremona, who spent a lot to acquire four *carzimasia* (total eunuchs), a gift that brought him into high favor with Constantine VII.²⁷ Nor was this

confined to the imperial court, since the importance of eunuchs in aristocratic households is confirmed by numerous references, for instance, in the list of Digenes's marriage gifts, as well as in hagiographical sources of the Middle Byzantine period. The idea that they could be trusted, not only as loyal servants of the emperor, with no family relatives to consider, but also in contact with women may have been deceptive. Nonetheless, it was their inability to procreate that qualified them as suitable guardians and protectors of the imperial *gynaikonitis*, the female quarters, areas reserved to women that also existed in all wealthy households. This characteristic was shared by Islamic societies, where eunuchs not only worked in harems but also served as the guardians of sacred space.²⁸

In many cultures castration is considered repressive, that is, a form of punishment for political and sexual offenses, but in nineteenth-century China boys so mutilated and men who chose eunuchism made light of their loss.²⁹ In situations of dire poverty, eunuchism like prostitution may be forced upon the poor. But the process of creating eunuchs and their standing in society is probably related to social expectation. Byzantine fathers who subjected their sons to it certainly anticipated benefits for the family.

The acceptance of such a third gender, defined by a go-between as well as in-between character, creates a potential for transvestism, which women traditionally exploit. Much has been written recently about the disguise adopted by women when they wished to flee from patriarchal authority, usually to attain their ambition of joining a monastic community. Leaving aside the fictive narratives that make such stories so popular and enjoyable even today, it is worthwhile considering cross-dressing as a subversion of gender identity in Byzantium. For women, cutting their hair and dressing in male clothing was sufficient to pass as a eunuch.³⁰ In the eighth century women were still using a male disguise to enter shrines from which women were barred.³¹ This could be encouraged as a device to deceive an enemy, for example, when the governor of Attaleia tried to convince Arab invaders that the city was strongly defended, by ordering the young women to dress as men and go up on the ramparts.³²

The continuing fascination of such tales of disguise that haunted the Byzantine imagination is illustrated by one of the anonymous tenth-century *Spiritually Beneficial Tales*.³³ The uncle of the heroine, Anna, was a very holy man, an iconophile who had suffered persecution in the eighth century. He predicted the death of Anna's child(ren), which followed, leaving her most distraught. However, she then distributed her goods to the poor and left Constantinople intending to become a monk. She met one of the monks from Mount

Olympos who agreed to tonsure her, and in secret she put on man's clothing but with her woman's habit on top. Then, discarding the outer garments, she appeared at Olympos and presented herself at a monastery. The abbot received her and in the course of their dialogue established her reasons for seeking the monastic life (great sins), her name Euphemianos, and her desire to keep silence (*hesuchasas*) for the remaining years of her life. He admitted her saying: "the nature of eunuchs is easily ensnared by passionate-and-emotional thoughts [*tois empathesi logismois*]." Her subsequent adventures make an exciting story, but the key is that she remained disguised despite people's doubts about her gender. She continued to perform miracles and lived the angelic life in a number of different places until finally she died.

But even more interesting is the reverse form of cross-dressing, when men use female clothing to avoid detection. Procopius records an instance of a military man who gets his wife to visit him in jail and then walks out in her clothes.³⁴ Again the story is as old as the hills, but here it is reused to reflect the general's brilliance. In wartime, when under pressure as the inhabitants of Constantinople were in 742/43, even the bravest men can resort to this ploy: Theophanes records how some tried to sneak out of the city in women's dress or disguised as monks.³⁵ Such a positive understanding of disguise must be contrasted with the bravura of Andronikos Komnenos in the late twelfth century, who refused to put on his mistress's clothes and thus escape when their tent was surrounded. Instead, he fought his way out against the odds and made off without losing his male identity.³⁶ In these circumstances he may have correctly guessed that Eudokia would have to appear in *his* clothes for the deception to work, as the two had been surprised in her tent and that would have been a more difficult disguise to carry off. The moral of the story seems inevitable: when in extreme circumstances, disguise as a woman may be employed by a man, but no self-respecting male would normally seek to adopt the clothing of a woman—it was far too demeaning, and too closely identified with the weak and feeble.

While cross-dressing is not an option for a "manly" male, it remains a real possibility for a woman. Does this mean that in the matter of clothing women are tempted to exercise greater nonconformity than men? Their similarity to eunuchs is what makes the deception work. In societies where eunuchism is not widespread, this possibility does not exist. Thus Joan of Arc has to go all the way, not only does she dress as a man, but she adopts the male role of the military leader, while stressing that she is only a weak woman. While this is not a phenomenon restricted to medieval Europe, it is not known in Byzantium. There the existence of Amazons makes it possible to demonize women who seek to fight as men (for example in the epic of

From this very basic summary of patriarchal control over marriage and the family, let us now move on to three areas of hagiographic documentation, which may help to identify aspects of Byzantine tolerance and repression within the family. The first concerns eccentric behavior by holy men in the tradition of the *salos*, though rarely quite as anti-social as St. Symeon. The determination of St. Kyrillos, previously Kyriakos, of Philea, to mold his family into an institution of Christian devotion presents a notable case.³⁸ I would remind you that his biographer Nikolaos Kataskepenos tells us nothing of his parents or youth, merely that he was ordained *anagnostes* by the archbishop of Derkos, and at age twenty he married a woman “beautiful in body, more beautiful in spirit,” not for sensual pleasure (*philedonias*) but for procreation (*paidopoiiias*) (3.1). There is no explanation of this marriage, which seems strange, since after the birth of their first child the rest of their married life is to be dedicated to abstinence from sex, except for the procreation of several more children. Nor is Kyrillos much interested in training or helping in the raising of his children. When his ten-year-old daughter is blinded in one eye by a stone thrown by a neighbor’s child of the same age, he blames himself with hot tears, but he does not go out to help the child or his wife. She calls him heartless and he replies peacefully to calm her anger (13.1–4), using the ancient *topos* that whoever insults the imperial image insults the emperor himself, and therefore anyone who injures a man made in God’s image is guilty of a great sin. He seems to imply that the child female was also made in God’s image. She survived a short time with no pain and then fell ill and died (an event not related to the blinding in one eye).

Nikolaos reports that the wife, never named, was a great help to Kyrillos; she also tried to imitate his fasting, bodily deprivation and punishment (3.10, 54). Because she had manly courage (*hos gunaikos andreias ouses*—a most common *topos* among male hagiographers) and was more precious than pearls, she provided constant support (3.10, 55). After working on ships for three years, Kyrillos went home with an ultimatum: either he would leave the family, or he would stay but devote himself entirely to his own monastic style of bodily mortification within the home. With tears his wife begged him to stay, identifying herself as his servant, (*doulen*, 6.2, 66) begging him not to render the children orphans, not to allow the hostile neighbors to attack them physically or mentally. She promised that she and the children would continue to work on the land they owned, and with God’s help they would have what they needed to survive (and she quotes the Old and New Testaments and the psalms of David). So he stayed and built inside the house a little cell where he could kneel

down and pray (6.3, 67), that is, he observed a monastic routine within the home and did nothing productive to support the family. His wife effectively became the head of the household. Even when he helped the fishermen to repair their nets, it was not for money but to combat *akedia* and for the love of his brothers, *philadelphias*.

Eventually, Kyrillos entered a monastery founded by his brother and lived the rest of his long life away from the family. One son joined him there, but nothing more is heard of his long-suffering wife, who tolerated his anti-social behavior in an exemplary fashion. One final point of interest in this very long *Vita*: when the saint shelters a stranger overnight, they spend long hours in discussion: *praktika kai psychophele prosomilesantes* (12.1–2, 78–79). This suggests that the spiritually beneficial stories of the Middle Byzantine period may have held a more significant position in social intercourse than might be imagined, for it was surely through such encounters that the retelling and elaboration of such adventures become more embroidered and less credible. But these were the stories that people loved to hear.

The second area of interest for our problem is connected with couples who renounce the primary function of marriage, which is procreation, and determine to live without sexual relations. This subversion of normal family life is much opposed by parents longing to become grandparents; see the protests of Theophanes's father, Isaakios.³⁹ Though it is quite common for early Christian saints to take vows of chastity on their wedding night, this is less often recorded in Middle Byzantine saints' lives. Saints Konon and Demetrianos represent the same determination—and although Demetrianos was married by his parents at fifteen, he never slept with his wife, who may have been even younger, and three months later she died, a virgin.⁴⁰

If such commitment can be made by teenagers, how much more likely is it to influence young widows who have already experienced a perhaps unwanted marriage and set their face against another? I have argued elsewhere that there are key moments in a woman's life cycle when she may exercise more initiative: at puberty when marriage is first proposed; at widowhood, especially if this occurs when she is still young and fertile; and again later as an older woman past child-bearing years.⁴¹ But it must be emphasized that only wealthy widows had any choice in the matter; for most, remarriage was an economic necessity.

Widowed mothers, however, who refuse to remarry may be helped by the church authorities, who provide the forceful notion that loyalty to the first husband may make a widow *univira*, the woman of one man only. Their male children, for example, St. Symeon Stylites or Holy Luke of Steiris, often display precocious signs of sanctity and

persuade their mothers to allow them to follow their religious calling, however harmful this may be to family fortunes.⁴² Other widows may subsequently decide to dispose of their property and enter a monastery (St. Theodora of Thessalonike), or just remain in their widowed state, doing good works and assisting the church through charitable actions, lighting the lamps, sweeping the steps, and other menial tasks (Theodora in the *Vita Basilii Junioris*).

Where they cannot avoid the persistence of suitors, widows occasionally take drastic action and simply disappear. Among the stories “useful for the soul,” collected by Paul of Monemvasia in the mid-tenth century, there are several instances. One concerns a woman married to a *protospatharios* in Constantinople, who died leaving her aged twenty-two with two small children.⁴³ A very powerful man, τῖς τῶν μεγανιστάνων τῶν πολλὰ δυναμένων (*tis ton meganistanon ton polla dynamenon*), later identified as *endoxotaton* (most illustrious) sent his servants to carry her off by force. She escaped their intentions by the familiar feminine ruse of claiming she had a foul-smelling wound that needed treatment for forty days, and after that she promised to go with them. As soon as they had gone she set about planning her disappearance, freed all her slaves, distributed all her goods to widows, orphans, and the poor (no mention of her two children), and made one of her relatives (*philochriston tina syggenea mon* [a Christ-loving relative of mine], 32.67) swear to sell all her property, her house, and so on, and distribute the proceeds to the poor. Then she left with just two servants; they took a boat but ended up inland in the mountains of the *Anatolikon thema*. Eleven years later, when their clothes had worn away to nothing and the birds (including a crow, *korax*) had fed them on food stolen from a nearby monastery garden and trees with berries and the like, they were discovered by an official from the capital, *dioiketes*, sent to collect taxes from the monastery.

Third, I would like to draw attention to the extent of violence within marriage that seems to me a most obvious sign of repression. Wife beating may be a constant feature of most social formations, and Byzantium is no exception, though there it is not a cause for divorce. From the treatment of St. Euphemia by her Gothic husband to St. Mary the Younger and another military spouse there is a depressing monotony to the oppressive as well as repressive habits of married men.⁴⁴ A further instance, this time of mental cruelty inflicted by a husband's relations on his wife are revealed in another *Spiritually Beneficial Story*: *Peri tes gynaikos tes heuretheises en te nesw* (About the woman found on the island).⁴⁵ It concerns a Christ-loving man, *philochristos*, who adopted the orphaned poor young girl and married her to his only son, not caring about her *ptocheian kai dysgeneian* (poverty and humble birth, 98.30), and after his death the relatives

complained that he had not found a bride of his own highly elevated status, but instead *tauten ten penichran kai dysgene* (this poor girl of lowly origins, 98.33–34). The husband declared himself well pleased with her, saying that she was of great value and good ... and had the virtue that brings one close to God (*chresimotaten kai kalen ... areten to Theo prosoikeiousan*, 98.36–37). So he continued to defend his wife while the relatives made their lives miserable by such accusations. She begged him to let her go into a monastery and choose another wife equal in honor to himself, *homoian sou periphane kai endoxon*, but he refused. She however couldn't bear to see him tormented and persecuted by them, so she fled one night by boat and arrived at the island, where the priest-monk who told the tale found her.

The story develops with a wonderful Robinson Crusoe element: she didn't know she was pregnant at the time and had nothing but the clothes she was wearing. These she cut up to make swaddling clothes, *esparganosa*, for the son she bore several months later. Together they survived on the island for thirty years and she longed for a priest to come and baptize him. Miracle of miracles! God sent her the monk who was also a priest, the baptism was performed, and they took the eucharist together. They asked for some clothes and to be left in peace, and made the monk-priest promise not to say anything until he got back to Constantinople and not to mention the name of the island so that no one would know where they were!

In the thirteenth century Demetrios Chomatenos documents a new twist to this repeated scenario of marital violence: wives who felt their lives were too miserable to be prolonged tried to commit suicide by throwing themselves off mountain tops or into deep, fast-moving rivers. The archbishop was concerned that this should be prevented, because the taking of Christian life was such a serious sin.⁴⁶ But he could see that there were mitigating circumstances. So when after investigation and some experimentation—they were locked up in a hut to try and sort out their disagreements—he discovered that the couple still fought like cat and dog and could no longer live together decently, he granted them a separation. He thus admitted that there might be irreconcilable differences, which could push a woman to suicide. Such a sympathetic view of the failure of marriage makes Chomatenos seem very modern, quite unlike the majority of Byzantine lawmakers and judges. So perhaps he should take the prize for tolerance.⁴⁷

After surveying these three areas of hagiographic testimony to patterns of toleration and repression within the family, it appears that the issues are nearly always gender-specific. Men are rarely faced with ascetic commitments that render their wives inaccessible in the fashion of St. Kyrillos Phileotes. Theophano, the pious first wife of Leo

VI, may fall into this category, but her saintliness merely encouraged him to take a mistress for sexual needs. He subsequently celebrated her great holiness in a special shrine dedicated to her. On the other hand, when men manifest an asexual devotion, their wives must accept it with good grace. Similarly, “battered women” are not protected from violent spouses until Chomatenos intervenes in a few individual cases. For centuries they must accept whatever treatment their husbands believe is appropriate, and only in the twelfth century is there a hint in the literary sources of women spitefully getting their own back through satirical mockery and cuckolding.⁴⁸ Violence within marriage is clearly a form of gender-specific repression.

Perhaps in the area of conjugal commitment to a spiritual marriage there may be a shared decision to subvert the normal consequences of marital policy decided by parents? The paucity of evidence makes it difficult to assert any general claim about the survival of this practice beyond the period of Late Antiquity.⁴⁹ It is as hard to argue that the use of the *topos* preserved a real possibility of following this course of action as it is to claim that even a few instances present only the tip of the iceberg. Certainly, most evidence suggests that by the ninth century developed forms of monasticism permitted males to follow their ascetic leanings, thus avoiding marriage. Again it was much harder for young women with the same dedication to escape their parents’ marital strategies.

In conclusion I would like to suggest that the inherited social traditions of Byzantium may have had a potential for slightly more toleration than other societies of the time, either in Western or Central Europe, Russia, or the Islamic world. Drawing on Michael Walzer’s lectures, toleration as a principle may depend on a self-conscious notion of superiority, which gives the members of a society a sense of purpose and confidence that they exist in well-ordered state, where powers and responsibilities are clearly fixed in mirror reflection of God’s ordered Heaven.⁵⁰ In addition, when that state has accommodated many different ethnic groups, people with military skills, long-distance mercantile contacts, numerous languages, styles of dress, modes of spirituality, and even alternative legal traditions, there is likely to be more room for difference. This is not to claim that Byzantium was less repressive than other states, witness the tight regulation of political, religious, economic, and social relations that were infringed at the risk of mutilation, torture, and other forms of punishment. But its geographic position at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea worlds, linking Africa and the Far North, meant inevitably that Byzantium became familiar with many foreigners, outsiders, strangers, and totally unknown persons.⁵¹

International contacts may have strengthened the Byzantine notion of identity, defined more by acquired characteristics—use of Greek, observance of Orthodoxy, loyalty to the emperor—than by inborn qualities.⁵² It may have allowed for more variation and difference than contemporary Western societies, even in matters of gender and family. But that said, there is no lack of evidence for the continuing patriarchal control of family life, which re-created in Byzantium patterns of repression, particularly of women, that we may recognize as familiar. As the new millennium continues, this should surely promote even greater commitment to the removal of such false notions of supremacy based solely on gender.

NOTES

1. Michael Walzer, *On Toleration* (New York/London, 1997) esp. ch. 2, “Five Regimes of Toleration,” 14–36.
2. Walzer, as earlier, 14–18.
3. David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecutions of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1996), esp. 3–17, 199–249. **Update** Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (New York, 2002); Mark Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1994).
4. Chrysa Maltezou, ed., *Oi Perithoriakoi sto Vyzantio* (Athens, 1993). **Update** Dion Smythe “Insiders and Outsiders,” in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (Oxford, 2010), 67–80.
5. R. I. Moore, *The Origins of European Dissent* (London, 1977); *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe 950–1250* (Oxford, 1987). **Update** J. C. Laursen and C. Nederman, eds., *Beyond the Persecuting Society: Religious Toleration before the Enlightenment* (Philadelphia, 1998), esp. 13–24; C. J. Nederman, ed., *Worlds of Difference: Discourses of European Toleration, 1100–1550* (University Park, PA, 2000), 1–10; Kate Langdon Forham, “Respect, Interdependence, Virtue: A Medieval Theory of Toleration in the Works of Christine de Pizan,” in *Difference and Dissent: Theories of Toleration in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. C. J. Nederman and J. C. Laursen (Lanham, MD, 1996), 67–82.
6. G. Stanton and G. Stroumsa, eds., *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Cambridge, UK, 1998), 356–61, the postscript by Stroumsa, “The Future of Intolerance.” **Update** Glenn W. Ohlsen, “The Middle Ages in the History of Toleration: A Prolegomena,” *Mediterranean Studies* 16 (2007), 1–20; Peter Garnsey, “Religious Toleration in Classical Antiquity,” in *Persecution and Toleration*, ed. W. J. Sheils (Oxford, 1984), 1–27, esp. 13–27 on early Christian persecution.
7. H.-G. Beck, “Orthodoxie und Alltag,” in *Aphieroma ston Andrea N. Strato*, 2 vols. (Athens 1986), II, 329–46; idem, “Formes de non-conformisme à Byzance ...,” *Bulletin de l’Académie royale de Belgique: Classe des lettres, série 5*, 65 (Brussels, 1979); idem, *Das Byzantinische Jahrtausend* (Munich, 1978). **Update** On the difficulty of separating dissidence from heresy, see *Eretici, dissidenti, musulmani ed ebrei a Bisanzio: una raccolta eresiologica del XII secolo*, ed. P. Eleuteri and A. Rigo (Venice, 1993).
8. Dieter Simon, ed., *Religiöse Devianz: Untersuchungen zu den sozialen, rechtlichen und theologischen Reaktionen auf religiöse Abweichung im westlichen und östlichen*

Mittelalter (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1990). **Update** *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Byzantium*, ed. Antonio Rigo and Pavel Ermilov (Rome, 2010).

9. David Herlihy, *Women, Family and Society in Medieval Europe: Historical Essays 1978–91* (Providence/Oxford, 1995), esp. ch. 6, “Family” (1991), 113–33; ch. 7 “The Making of the Medieval Family: Symmetry, Structure, Sentiment” (1987), 135–53; ch. 11, “Medieval Children” (1978), 215–46; idem, *Medieval Households* (Cambridge, MA, 1985). C. Klapisch-Zuber and D. Herlihy, *Les Toscans et leurs familles, une étude de catasto florentin de 1427* (Paris, 1978); C. Klapisch-Zuber, *La maison et le nom, stratégies et rituels dans l’Italie de la Renaissance* (Paris, 1990). Renée Hirschon, ed., *Women and Property—Women as Property* (London/Canberra/New York, 1984), esp. her contribution, “Introduction: Property, Power and Gender Relations,” 1–22. **Update** Elisheva Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children in Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe* (Princeton, 2007), provides a stimulating exploration of family life.

10. Angeliki Laiou-Thomadakis, *Peasant Society in the Late Byzantine Empire: A Social and Demographic Study* (Princeton, 1977).

11. E. A. Hammel, “Demographic Constraints on the Formation of Traditional Balkan Households,” *DOP* 44 (1990), 172–86; G. G. Litavrin, “Family Relations and Family Law in the Byzantine Countryside of the Eleventh Century: An Analysis of the Praktikon of 1073,” in *ibid.*, 187–93, esp. 188 on women heads of household and 191 on under-recording of women.

12. A. Laiou, “Contribution à l’institution familiale en Epire au XIII^e siècle,” *Fontes minores* 6 (1984), 275–323. **Update** See now the new edition of Demetrios Chomatenos by Günter Prinzing, *Demetrii Chomatēni Ponemata diaphora*, CFHB 38 (Berlin/New York, 2002).

13. A. Laiou, ed., *Sex, Coercion and Consent to Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies* (Washington, DC, 1993). In contrast, her short study, *Mariage, amour et parenté à Byzance aux XI^e–XIII^e siècles* (Paris, 1992), while it gets closer to the realities of family toleration and repression, does not address those aspects in detail.

14. P. Magdalino, “Enlightenment and Repression in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: The Evidence of the Canonists,” in *To Vyzantio kata ton dodekaton aiona*, ed. N. Oikonomides (Athens, 1991), 357–74. R. Browning, “Enlightenment and Repression in Byzantium in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries,” *Past and Present* 69 (1975), 3–23, reprinted in his *Studies on Byzantine History, Literature and Education* (London, 1977).

15. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180* (Cambridge, UK, 1993), cf. Lynda Garland, “Conformity and Licence at the Byzantine Court in the eleventh and twelfth centuries: the Case of Imperial Women,” *BF* 21 (1995), 101–15.

16. J. Nesbitt and J. Wiita, “A Confraternity of the Comnenian Era,” *BZ* 68 (1975), 360–84. **Update** Leonora Neville, “Taxing Sophronia’s Son-in-Law: Representations of Women in Provincial Documents,” in *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience 800–1200*, ed. Lynda Garland (Aldershot, UK, 2006), 77–89.

17. Litavrin, as earlier, 188.

18. As earlier, 191.

19. Psellos mentions in passing that Eudokia, the eldest daughter of Constantine VIII, begged to be allowed to enter a nunnery, rather than be used in the marriage game of eleventh-century imperial alliances, probably because she had suffered from smallpox, which made her expect failure in the marriage market, *Chronographia*, bk. 2, 4–5, I, 27–28; Eng. trans., 55–56.

20. Ruth Macrides and Anthony Cutler, “Adoption,” *ODB*, I, 22. **Update** See now R. Macrides, “The Byzantine Godfather,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 12 (1987), 139–62; eadem, “Substitute Parents and Their Children,” in *Adoption et fosterage*, ed. M. Corbier (Paris, 1999), 307–19.

21. S. Leontisini, *Die Prostitution im frühen Byzanz* (Vienna, 1989).
22. J. Wortley, ed and trans., *Les Récits édifiants de Paul de Monemvasie* (Paris, 1987), 9/VI, BHG 1449e, now in his Eng. trans. *The Spiritually Beneficial Tales of Paul of Monembasia* (Kalamazoo, 1996); L. Ryden, ed. and trans., *The Life of St. Andrew the Fool* (Uppsala, 1995), prologue, II, 12. **Update** Youval Rotman, *Byzantine Slavery and the Mediterranean World* (Cambridge, MA 2009).
23. Wortley, 8/III, BHG 1449b.
24. On castration in general, see the analysis of Evelyne Patlagean, "Byzance et le blason pénal du corps," in *Du châtement dans la cité: Supplices corporels et peine de mort dans le monde antique* (Rome, 1984), 405–26.
25. Paul Magdalino, "Paphlagonians in Byzantine High Society," in *He byzantine Mikra Asia* (Athens, 1998), 141–50.
26. On eunuchs in general, see K. Ringrose, "Living in the Shadows: Eunuchs and Gender in Byzantium," in G. Herdt, ed., *Third Sex, Third Gender* (New York, 1994), 85–110, 507–18; eadem, "Eunuchs as Cultural Mediators," *BF* 23 (1996), 75–93; Shaun Tougher, "Byzantine Eunuchs: An Overview, with Special Reference to Their Creation and Origin," in *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (London, 1997), 168–84. **Update** On blinding, see Judith Herrin, "Blinding in Byzantium," in *Polypheuros Nous: Festschrift Peter Schreiner*, ed. Georgios Makris and Cordula Scholz (Munich, 2000), 56–68.
27. A. P. Kazhdan and M. McCormick, "The Social World of the Byzantine Court," in *Court Culture in Byzantium, 829–1204*, ed. H. Maguire (Washington, DC, 1997), 167–98, esp. 178–81, 193, 196; Liutprand of Cremona and his gift of *carzimasia*, *Antapodosis*, ed. J. Becker, *MGH SRG* 41 (Hannover/Leipzig, 1915), bk. 6.6.
28. Shaun Marmon, *Guardians of Sacred Space* (Princeton, 1996). **Update** For recent bibliography on eunuchs, see Shaun Tougher, "Cherchez l'homme: Byzantine Men, a Eunuch Perspective," in *The Byzantine World*, ed. Paul Stephenson (London/New York, 2010). On the power relations of eunuchs, see Liz James, "Men, Women, Eunuchs: Gender, Sex and Power," in *The Social History of Byzantium*, ed. John Haldon (Oxford, 2009), 31–50.
29. Marina Warner, *The Dragon Empress: The Life and Times of Tz'u-Hsi 1835–1908, Empress Dowager of China* (London, 1972). R. Van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China* (Leiden, 1961), 29–30, 87–88, 54–56.
30. E. Patlagean, "L'histoire de la femme déguisée en moine et l'évolution de la sainteté à Byzance," *Studi medievali* 17 (1976), 597–623; Nathalie Delierneux, "Virilité physique et sainteté féminine dans l'hagiographie du IV^e au VII^e siècles," *B* 67 (1997), 179–243. **Update** Stavroula Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances: Reading the Body in Byzantine Passions and Lives of Holy Women* (Uppsala 2005), 90–126; Judith Herrin, "Public and Private Forms of Religious Commitment among Byzantine Women," [chapter 6](#) in this volume, esp. note 79.
31. S. Efthymiades, ed. and trans., *The Life of the Patriarch Tarasios by Ignatios the Deacon* (Birmingham, 1998), para. 66, 160–61. **Update** This anxiety continued right into the fifteenth century; see Anthony Kaldellis, "The Study of Women and Children: Methodological Challenges and New Directions," in Stephenson, as earlier, 61–71.
32. Vita of Antony the Younger, BHG 142, cited by Alexander P. Kazhdan, "Byzantine Hagiography and Sex, Fifth to Twelfth Centuries," *DOP* 44 (1990), 132.
33. Wortley, as earlier, no. 20, BHG 2027, 144–49.
34. Procopius, *Wars*, vol. 1, bk. 1, vi, *Procopii Caesariensis Opera Omnia*, ed. J. Haury (Leipzig, 1905–13; repr. 1962–64); Eng. trans. H. B. Dewing (London/Cambridge MA, 1914–40; repr. 1971). My thanks to Geoffrey Greatrex and Anthony Kaldellis for reminding me about Cabades' escape.

35. *Theophanes*, I, 420.
36. Alexander P. Kazhdan and Giles Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium* (Washington, DC, 1982), 72.
37. C. Galatariotou, "Holy Women and Witches: Aspects of Byzantine Conceptions of Gender," *BMGS* 9 (1984–85), 55–94.
38. E. Sargologos, ed. and trans., *La Vie de Saint Cyrille le Philéote moine byzantin (†1110)* (Brussels, 1964). **Update** Margaret Mullett, "Food for the Spirit and a Light for the Road: Reading the Bible in the *Life of Cyril Philéotes* by Nicholas Kataskepenos," in *Literacy, Education and Manuscript Transmission in Byzantium and Beyond*, ed. Catherine Holmes and Judith Waring (Leiden, 2002), 139–64.
39. *Theophanes*, II, 5–6. **Update** See the study by Anne P. Alwis, *Celibate Marriages in Late Antique and Byzantine Hagiography* (London, 2011), with the edition and translation of three lives based on this form of renunciation.
40. Cf. St. Demetrianos, cited by Kazhdan, as earlier, 132–33.
41. Herrin, "Public and Private Forms of Religious Commitment among Byzantine Women," [chapter 6](#) in this volume; cf. Alice-Mary Talbot, "The Byzantine Woman," in *The Byzantines*, ed. Guglielmo Carvallo (Chicago, 1997), 117–43.
42. Herrin, "L'enseignement maternel à Byzance," in *Femmes et pouvoirs des femmes à Byzance et en Occident (VIe–XIe siècles)*, ed. S. Lebecq et al. (Lille, 1999), 91–102, now in an expanded English version, "Unrivalled Influence: Mothers and Daughters in the Medieval Greek World," [chapter 4](#) in this volume.
43. Wortley, as earlier, no. 1, BHG 1449.
44. S. Euphemia and the Goth, ed. and trans. F. C. Burkitt (Oxford, 1913); on St. Mary the Younger, see Kazhdan and Constable, *People and Power*, as earlier, 72–75, and the translation of her *Life* by Angeliki Laiou, in *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation*, ed. Alice-Mary Talbot (Washington, DC, 1996), 239–90. **Update** Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances*, as earlier, 162–92.
45. Wortley, as earlier, no. 12, II, BHG 1449a.
46. Laiou, "L'institution familiale ...," as earlier, note 12.
47. D. Simon, "Die Bussbescheide des Erzbischofs Chomatian von Ochrid," *JÖB* 37 (1987), 235–75; G. Dagron, "La règle et l'exception. Analyse de la notion d'économie," in D. Simon, *Religieuse Deviance*, as earlier, 1–18, esp. 3, 17. **Update** See the study of Demetrios Chomatenos by Günter Prinzing cited earlier, note 12.
48. If we can take at face-value the fun poked at husbands considered inadequate in sexual terms by their quick-witted wives; see Margaret Alexiou, "Ploys of Performance: Games and Play in the Ptochoprodromic Poems," *DOP* 53 (1999), 91–109; Lynda Garland, "'And His Bald Head Shone Like a Full Moon ...': An Appreciation of the Byzantine Sense of Humor as Recorded in the Historical Sources of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," *Parergon* n.s. 8 (1990), 1–31. **Update** Anthony Kaldellis warns against assuming that beaten wives were quite so prevalent in Byzantium, "The Study of Women and Children," in Stephenson, as earlier, 64.
49. I am indebted to the research by Anne Alwis, whose thesis on "Celibate Marriage in Late Antiquity" is now published; see note 39 earlier.
50. On the importance of *taxis* in Byzantium, see the recent analysis in Henry Maguire, ed., *Court Culture in Byzantium 829–1204* (Washington, DC, 1997).
51. See the collected papers, ed. Dion C. Smythe, *Strangers unto Themselves: The Byzantine Outsider* (Aldershot, UK, 2000). **Update** See idem, "Insiders and Outsiders" in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (Oxford, 2010), 67–80.
52. Angeliki E. Laiou, "Institutional Mechanisms of Integration," in Hélène Ahrweiler and Angeliki E. Laiou, *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire* (Washington, DC, 1998), 161–81.

THE ICON CORNER IN MEDIEVAL BYZANTIUM



Every Byzantinist, especially those of Russian descent, knows the Orthodox tradition of an icon corner. Throughout the Balkans, Greece, the East Mediterranean and among diaspora communities all over the world, the protecting role of household saints is guaranteed by icons. Many modern ones are small, metal objects without names, but in past centuries they were often painted panels with inscriptions identifying Christ, the Mother of God or a particular saint. As guardians of the household they would be offered lights, incense, flowers, or simple veneration on a daily basis. On the name day of the saint, and the major feasts of Christ and the Virgin, their images would be given more intense veneration, just as icons in churches would be displayed in a prominent position to receive the kisses and prayers of worshippers while the saint's life was read in the liturgy.

But when and how did the icon corner develop? This was a problem that I considered for many years, dating back to meetings in Groningen described in the Introduction. Tom Mathews and Norman Muller have recently suggested a new origin for Christian icons as well as pointing to the importance of private veneration in a domestic context. A further element has been added by Kim Bowles with her important studies of private and public forms of worship and households in Late Antiquity. While there is much more to do, this chapter demonstrates connections between the feminine world of the household and family, private forms of Christian worship, and gendered roles within the Christian hierarchy that generated quite stormy debate in the fourth and fifth centuries.

FROM CLASSICAL TIMES ONWARD, one of the basic tasks of women was to take care of the household *lares*, representatives of the ancient gods, whose presence was felt to protect and assist the family. In every dwelling with a hearth female members attended these deities with appropriate rituals. Even though it might require no more than a token offering of incense or a gesture of respect, such actions helped to guarantee the well-being of the entire family. In the form of statuettes, often gilded, as well as framed wooden panel paintings, local deities occupied a prominent domestic space long into the Christian era. The suggestion of this chapter is that when the family converted to Christianity the ancient household gods were replaced by Christian icons, which took over the same role and protected the same space. It seems likely that women's responsibility for, and devotion to, the household protectors was transferred from the old deities to the

new Christian God. Although there is no direct evidence for a removal of the older representations in order to institute new ones, when icons are later found in a domestic setting, they are in precisely that part of the home that is the particular preserve of women. It is this association between domestic cult and the veneration of icons in Byzantium that I wish to explore.

The sources for such an investigation are very patchy. Archaeological evidence for the layout of Late Antique houses in the East Mediterranean rarely includes furnishings, and no free-standing Christian icons have been found in situ. The 1980s excavations in Alexandria revealed a unique fresco of the Mother of God and Christ Child, very poorly preserved in the main area of a private house.¹ This rare instance confirms the decoration of households but it remains most unusual. Fortunately, there are many references to similar icons and frescoes in literary sources, mainly writings about saints (hagiography) and miracle collections. While the earliest preserved icons are now in museums and monastic collections, such as the monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai, in many cases their date, place of origin and means of transfer there are unknown. These examples appear to date from the fifth and sixth centuries. And literary references of the same period to the use of icons in a domestic setting imply the practice of maintaining an icon corner in early Byzantine houses. By bringing together these disparate sources from the sixth to the tenth century, I wish to draw attention to the private context of much Christian devotion, both in households and in public shrines.

The earliest preserved Christian icons are painted on thin boards of wood either in *tempera* (pigment ground in water-miscible medium and applied to several layers of wet gesso) or *encaustic* (the technique of using heated, colored wax to model and highlight the personal features). Both were used for painting portraits all over the Roman world, but it is only in the dry heat of Egypt, particularly in the area of the Fayum, that they have survived. Images of the ancient gods were also executed in both techniques. Recently, Professor Tom Mathews has assembled over thirty examples of these earlier portraits, chiefly of Egyptian deities.² While several had been known for a long time, they had not previously been accorded detailed investigation as a body, which is now being expanded by the addition of many fragmentary samples from the depots of different museums of classical archaeology. These paintings of pagan gods and heroes form a newly recognized body of household protectors distinct from the more common statuettes.

What is particularly interesting, however, is that some of these pagan representations were also framed and displayed on the walls of

private houses. Through analysis of these portraits and their find-spots, Mathews has added another dimension to this discussion: a domestic aspect of the cult. One of his most revealing discoveries has been the placing of these cult objects in the inner rooms of houses preserved in Egypt.³ In these larger complexes, images of the protecting deities seem to have been hung on the walls of rooms that were not generally accessible to visitors. This custom suggests a private cult of the god, celebrated by the owner of the image and his family in the privacy of a family room. The image may even have been displayed over the bed where the couple slept, an obvious form of protection.

The use of such cult images in inner rooms of private houses takes the traditional notion of the household *lares* one step further. In addition to statuettes and symbols of the deities, specific gods are depicted in their human form. Only five out of Matthews's group of thirty-one pagan icons were found in their original settings. But four of these five come from domestic areas inside houses. In contrast to the cult statues, which formed the main focus of pagan worship in public temples, this domestic cult was on a smaller and less extravagant scale. It is characterized by framed images, which often have grooves for a cover; by triptychs, with outer wings hinged to the central panel, which they cover when closed; by the presence of donor figures (in three cases); by the frequent depiction of military deities, often identified by inscriptions; and above all by the full-length, frontal pose of the god, sometimes with a halo, carrying the symbols of power. All these features suggest that images such as Isis and Suchos enthroned in an encaustic portrait were for private use and served a personal need.⁴ And women may have been responsible for covering or closing them; for decorating them with flowers, incense, and other offerings; even for commissioning them. The fact that this cult appears in private inner chambers may perhaps imply that it set a precedent for the icon corner of later Christian houses.⁵

PRIVATE VENERATION IN COPTIC EGYPT

This continuity can be traced in at least one Egyptian household, where the Christian archangel took the place of the older deities. In a Coptic sermon on St. Michael an elderly man realizes that he is about to die and his wife Euphemia asks him to commission the painting of an icon.⁶ They order a wooden icon of the archangel, which she intends to put in her bedroom, "so that when you die it will watch over me and save me from the wiles of the Unjust One [the Devil] and every human temptation." And the painter came and was instructed

how to make the image, and “they gilded it with fine gold inlaid with precious stones of great value and she rejoiced over it like one who has found great riches.” So when the hour came for the husband to pass away,

the husband took her hand and put it upon the hand of the archangel Michael whose image was depicted ... and he cried out saying: “O Archangel Michael ... behold, in thy hands I place my wife Euphemia as a deposit, so that thou mayst watch over her.”

Once this was done he died. And she continued offering the icon of St. Michael incense, keeping a lamp lit before it at all times, and making *proskynesis* before it three times a day she asked him to help her. The Archangel continued to protect Euphemia in her widowhood, thwarting all the devil’s attempts to corrupt her, which are recorded in lively detail. When she realized that she was dying, she kissed the icon and it was placed over her eyes. St. Michael himself then appeared in magnificent clothing to carry her soul up to heaven.

In this vignette of concern about the safety and well-being of widow Euphemia, which is to be dated to the early seventh century, after the Arab conquest of Egypt, a number of issues relevant to early Christian icon veneration are underlined. This icon was commissioned from an artist for a particular purpose; it was hung in the couple’s bedroom, the innermost space of their house; the dying husband entrusted his wife to the archangel depicted on it, so that he would protect her and prevent any evil coming near her. After his death she gained much strength from her regular veneration of the icon, which eventually became a wonder-working icon in the local bishop’s church.

A similar association of icons with bedroom furniture is preserved in a seventh-century inventory of furnishings for a house in Oxyrhynchus, which records a great variety of decorative as well as functional pieces.⁷ The first item is a large bed, and the list continues with two small icons (*ikonidia*), one of St. Kollouthos, gilded around the head, and one of the Mother of God (*Theotokos*), gilded all over. Wooden panels, small wooden columns, balustrades, door panels, and marble capitals, as well as a couch and another bed complete the list. How all this was to be assembled by the servant Onouphrios in an inner *triklinium* (normally the word for dining room) is not clear. The combination of gilded icons and a bed, however, suggest some sort of devotion made by the family in private.

The replacement of gods represented on wooden icons in Egypt must have taken centuries, but the gradual transformation points to an abiding concern for household protection that appears to have been shared by women. Beyond the dry climate of North Africa less

evidence for such painted panels is preserved, so it is much harder to trace a similar process. Elite women in early medieval Byzantium probably lived in houses where the space was divided between that open to the street and the public and the more private family quarters.⁸ In both rural and urban settings the wealthiest families maintained separate areas for their womenfolk, in a manner similar to empresses in their numerous palaces. In most households some space was more public than others—and the chamber where the family slept was considered more private. Reference to such a room is made in a collection of miracles attributed to St. Symeon the Younger (521–92). According to the *Life* of the saint, a woman who had benefitted from a miraculous cure, commemorated the event in a painting, which she put up in an inner chamber of her house (“en to endotero autes oiko”). There it worked wonders and cured another woman who came and made her prostrations in front of it.⁹ This late sixth-century reference relates to the place where the icon corner might be found, where the images of pagan gods had once been displayed, and where women kept their own few belongings.

Personal property is mentioned in the wills drawn up by Byzantine women. Beds, covers, cushions, personal clothing, and jewelery feature among the objects typically stored in bedrooms, and these are often bequeathed to female relatives and to freed female slaves. It is also clear that women might own icons. A seventh-century collection of miracles documents the expectation that a mother named Sophia could realize enough money to pay the doctors’ fees by selling an icon, possibly one with a silver-gilt cover (*chrysargyron*).¹⁰ But this woman was genuinely poor and had no assets, nothing she could sell to pay the medical charge. Fortunately, she was directed to the shrine of St. Artemios, who like the *anargyroi* Sts. Kosmas and Damianos (“those without silver”), did not charge for healing her son. The relatively low cost of cheaper painted icons and impressed metal ones made it possible for many ordinary people to own them. They carried them on journeys and wore miniature ones called *enkolpia* around their necks.¹¹ Female ownership is not in doubt and it seems quite likely that icons were passed from mother to daughter, as were certain female articles of clothing, belts, headscarves, or gems, for example.

THE PUBLIC CULT OF THE *THEOTOKOS*

However, the written sources that document the earliest use of Christian icons associate them overwhelmingly with public celebrations. In Constantinople, capital of the Byzantine Empire, we can analyze the way in which icons of the Virgin become an

established part of her cult, and this can serve as a paradigm of the *public* manifestation of icon veneration. The forceful personality of Pulcheria, older sister of the Emperor Theodosius II who ruled through the first half of the fifth century, is associated with this process. But the empress Verina may have played a more significant role in the construction of three churches dedicated to the Virgin Mary, as well as the development of her feasts.¹² Interestingly, since Pulcheria had pledged herself to virginity, her identification with the Mother of God was not constructed through the maternal role. She had no interest in maternity and only agreed to a marriage of convenience with an elderly general when her brother died and the senators of Constantinople demanded a male ruler for the empire.

A major impetus to the development of Christian representations of the Virgin stemmed from the debate over her theological significance. Before the Council of Ephesus, held in 431, the precise role of Mary had not been established in any great detail—beyond the Gospel stories. But once that universal council of bishops had agreed that Mary should be honored by the title *Theotokos*, “she who bore God,” new liturgies were developed to celebrate it. At the churches dedicated to her, the Hodegetria, Chalkoprateia, and Blachernai, weekly vigils, processions, and services devoted to her feasts established a very public celebration of the Mother of God in Constantinople, which rapidly became popular and is documented in the sermons of Proclus, the bishop of the capital.¹³

These new structures were presumably decorated with images of the Virgin and Child, which commemorated her role as *Theotokos*. A later story connects the development of Marian iconography with a discovery made in Jerusalem by Eudokia, the estranged wife of Theodosios II. She had found an icon of Mary and the Christ child painted from life, it was claimed, by St. Luke.¹⁴ She is said to have sent this icon to Pulcheria, her sister-in-law, and Pulcheria installed it in the Hodegetria Church. Whether anyone believed that the picture was so old that it could really have been painted by the apostle or not, it may well have stimulated group representations of the Holy Family. But as nothing survives of this original painting, it is difficult to establish the origins of the iconography now made familiar by images such as the sixth-century encaustic portrait at Sinai.¹⁵

A generation later Leo I and his wife, Verina, added a magnificent chapel within the church at Blachernai, just beyond the walls of Constantinople, to house the precious *soros*, the girdle of the Virgin, and her veil, the only two surviving relics of her earthly life. They were laid in a gold and jewel-encrusted reliquary of great splendor, and above the emperor and his wife had their portraits painted together with their children before the enthroned Mother of God.

Another icon commemorated the two donors, aristocratic officials who had acquired the holy relic, some said by theft.¹⁶ They had themselves depicted together with angels and saints on either side of an enormous image of the Theotokos. In the absence of any surviving artistic record of this shrine, the commemoration of another rich patron, Turtura, in the catacombs at Rome, may perhaps provide a comparable image. In this fresco commissioned by her son the pious widow is shown with the Virgin and Child enthroned, flanked by saints. The force of these paintings is that they claim a role for the donors/patrons of the icon as people particularly close to the holy persons depicted, friends of the saints, beneficiaries of their holy powers. Normally, they are public statements made by wealthy and powerful members of the ruling class of their time.

In their new shrines in Constantinople imperial patronage ensured that these icons of the Theotokos would be incorporated into a popular aspect of Christian worship: weekly vigils, liturgies, and processions designed to enhance their power as intercessors. This is an essentially public activity that involves the inhabitants of the capital, so that by the sixth century a developed ritual can be extended by the addition of a Friday procession from Blachernai to Chalkoprateia modeled on the cult activity of Jerusalem.¹⁷ Similar developments in other urban centers result in the adoption of particular saints and their icons by communities, for example, Symeon in Antioch, Glykeria in Herakleia, Demetrios in Thessalonike.¹⁸ Through public rituals such holy protectors receive veneration, which is often orchestrated by the local bishop. Because of their healing powers, these icons are copied so that they can be paraded around the walls, fixed to shop fronts, erected in public squares, and set up in churches dedicated to their presence, where lamps are lit in front of them and miracles occur.¹⁹

The popular acclaim of icons based in specific public shrines, however, results in a particular aspect of icon veneration, a type of worship that is essentially private. Here is a source of passion, recorded in the prayers of individuals who beseech the holy person depicted to intercede for them, to provide them with success in love and marriage, fertility, conception, and offspring, with cures, or some reward for their devotion to the Christian images. It can be entirely individual or it can involve a group, such as a family. Often it does not act through the official channels of church services or liturgies at the shrine. Yet the private aspect of this sort of icon veneration propels the cult of holy images, with their curative, healing, and protective powers.

It is not difficult to identify the reasons for this: icons can dominate a particular sphere of worship, commanding an especially intense form of close-up, personal interaction. The viewer is drawn into the

image by the eyes of the person depicted, who gazes out from the painting in a very direct fashion. Even when the saint does not address the viewer but glances to the side, there is usually a pronounced frontality in the presentation of the figures. The invitation to some form of communication is commented on by many contemporaries, as well as the capacity to engage with the worshipper, in what is usually a private dialogue. A variety of texts preserve instances of such conversations reported between individuals and the holy persons depicted, often in a dream, or when half asleep, waiting for a message.²⁰ While the pagan gods had often been addressed with similar requests, through the medium of curse tablets or incubation in the temple precinct, as well as in private devotions within the house, the direct communication imagined between Christian saints and their human devotees constructs a profoundly fervent style of dialogue. This may be a significant factor in the development of the domestic and private cult of icons. And it is this aspect of personal devotion which seems to be particularly associated with women.

Many sources that provide evidence of this type of veneration were cited at the Council of Nicaea in 787 to justify the use of icons.²¹ Since they are well known and often quoted, I will not rehearse the arguments here. But it is significant that several of them concern the devotions of women who had particular faith in icons and addressed their personal prayers to holy images in hopes of miraculous intervention and healing. Elsewhere I have drawn attention to the special significance that this type of veneration may have had for women in early Christian times, since they were systematically excluded from official roles within the Byzantine Church. Apart from the possibility of becoming nuns (and many women did follow this route to an established position), the vast majority of women had no recognized role. They were urged to exercise philanthropy, embody Christian piety, and perform charitable acts. Personal devotion to their own icons that they kept at home is therefore quite understandable. And the responsiveness they felt in addressing the holy people depicted on them arises in part from the domestic context of their devotions, as well as from the narrow range of expressions of faith allowed to women in general.²²

PRIVATE VENERATION OF ICONS IN PUBLIC SHRINES

Despite the fact that this type of devotion is often performed in a church open to the public, in front of icons displayed in shrines and chapels, it also seems to have been a private activity carried on without the intervention of priests or other church officials. This

intensely personal aspect suggests that men and women found particular satisfaction in it. The parents of St. Elizabeth, for instance, made their prayers in front of an icon of St. Glykeria, the patron of Herakleia of Thrace.²³ Getting older and fearing that she would remain barren for ever, Euphemia begged the saint to grant her the gift of a child. After they had prayed both she and her husband fell asleep in the church and received night visions of Glykeria, who gave them instructions. As a result their daughter Elizabeth was born and the grateful parents returned to thank their patron for her miraculous intercession. On this occasion the father, Eunomianos, saw the saint's lips move on the icon, when Glykeria told him to fulfill his vows. The couple then asked the archbishop to baptize their daughter, who received the predicted name of Elizabeth.

From the well-known biblical models of Sarah, Elizabeth, and Anna right up to the present day, problems of infertility and conception seem to have remained fairly constant. The elderly couple blessed by an unexpected child through divine intervention is a common *topos* of Christian miracle stories. And in Late Antique and Byzantine times when children were considered the great blessing of marriage, and childlessness was mourned as a serious loss, for a woman to be barren was a terrible fate. It is often, therefore, a specifically feminine practice to request divine assistance from a living holy man, or through the medium of an icon or a wall painting. As one of the most famous women assisted in this process, Anna, the Virgin's mother, was considered a most effective intercessor and gained a revered place in the hearts of other women threatened by sterility or old age. They made their devotions in front of her images and invoked her help, both in their homes and in shrines or churches open to the public.²⁴

The well-known example of the mother of St. Stephen the Younger is all the more striking because she already had two daughters.²⁵ She regularly visited the shrine of the Virgin at Blachernai in the early eighth century and called on the Virgin and Anna, mother of the Virgin, after whom she was named, as well as Sarah and Elizabeth to grant her a son. As she made a lengthy appeal in front of the icon, interspersed with genuflections, *proskyneseis*, she fell asleep and received the vision and message of the Virgin, who raised her to a standing position, touched her side and answered her petition. On retaining her self-control, the woman returned home rejoicing and of course conceived (para. 4, 92). Forty days after the promised son was safely delivered, the parents went back together to the same shrine and again Anna addressed the icon directly. This time she gave thanks to the Theotokos for making the impossible happen, for curing her of the sterility that prevented her from having a son.

First, she greeted the Theotokos as all pure, immaculate, and quick

to save, and then with many tears she lifted the baby Stephen up to the image. She begged the Virgin, now identified as sovereign lady (“despoina”), she who responds (“antiphonetria”), a particularly appropriate epithet since the image had spoken to her, and she who provides loans (“daneistria”), to accept Stephen as her servant. The husband was surprised by the length of her prayer and her copious tears, but then Anna

took him by the hand and pointed out the divine icon, informing him that the Virgin was the guarantor, patron and protector of Stephen’s birth. And when they had both bent their heads and prostrated themselves on the sacred ground, giving thanks to she who is the guarantor and patron of all Christians, they returned home (para. 6, 94–95).

This mythic account of the conception of the *Neomartyr* nonetheless reveals much about the way in which celebrated icons might be used by individuals. In addressing their prayers directly to the person represented they spoke without constraint, pouring out their deepest fears and anxieties, hoping for some comfort, perhaps even a response. Their words were accompanied by veneration, actions, and prostration, “proskyneseis,” with tears and personal expressions of confidence in the power of holy persons to intercede, to make things happen. On giving thanks for the miracle of Stephen’s birth, the couple took over the sacred ground in front of the icon, “to hagian edaphos,” and made it their own for a moment (para. 6, 95.21–22). No one assisted or prevented them; they venerated the holy icon in their own fashion and for their own purposes. There was no problem in building a personal link between the holy person depicted and the worshipper. Even in a crowded church or at a busy road shrine, wherever an icon is displayed in public, it can become private momentarily.

A similar creation of private space is documented in the lives of saints and nuns who were always instructed to avoid eye contact with unknown visitors. Many spent years practicing “the custody of the eyes”: keeping their gaze fixed on the ground to be sure of not straying into any form of temptation, for as the Byzantines knew very well, the eyes are a passage through which dangers enter a person. As recorded in the *Epic of Digenes*:

when the girl saw the youth her heart was fired, she would not live on earth; Pain kindled in her, as is natural; Beauty is very sharp, its arrow wounds, and through the very eyes reaches the soul.²⁶

St. Elizabeth of Herakleia grew up as such a dedicated women; she kept her eyes on the ground for three years as a test of humility. As Alice-Mary Talbot puts it:

a nun's downcast gaze also served to create a private space around her that made her immune to temptation from male visitors and other nuns. Each was expected to build an invisible wall around herself comparable to the physical wall that shielded the cloister from the outside world.²⁷

Such privacy within a public space is widely documented in the activity of women at particular shrines. It confirms that medieval Byzantine women could visit shrines without constraint. Another interesting story, surely an invention, records the plan of a woman who was a convinced iconoclast to destroy the icon of the Virgin preserved in the Hodegetria Church. She approached the icon, which was known for its miraculous cures of blindness, and was prevented from attacking it only by the power of the Virgin. From being determined to obliterate the eyes on the painted image, she was converted and became a totally devoted iconophile.²⁸ While the account is preserved in a collection of miracles associated with this icon, the freedom of a woman to leave her home, enter a shrine even with destructive intentions (and the mode of destruction is typical),²⁹ and to return home again is not questioned. This unsupervised movement lies behind the numerous accounts of young girls using an icon in a particular church as a place for a tryst with a potential lover. These stories seem to have been as popular in Byzantium as they are today.

The personal relationship between an individual and a holy person depicted on an icon is enhanced by communication and visions and messages that pass between the icon and the believer: the well-known conversion of St. Mary of Egypt as recorded in her *Life* by Sophronios (affected by the icon of the Virgin in her church at Jerusalem), or the cure of a young girl, only twelve years old by St. Artemios. This girl had been sent to light the lamps in front of the icons at his shrine by an older woman who normally undertook the task. Her experience is one of numerous accounts of uneducated adults and children, who were familiar with the saints from their icons and from the prayers and liturgies associated with their cult. The young girl reported that she recognized the saint who appeared to her in a vision from his image on the icon screen (*iconostasis*) of the church, a feature repeated in many of the *Miracula Artemii*.³⁰ The collection of miracles was probably put together by those in charge of the shrine to consolidate the saint's cult. It also drew attention to a similar role played by St. Febronia, who specialized in female complaints. The stories not only imply an easy familiarity with the artistic traditions but also a firm belief in the power of intercession.

But there is even greater privacy in venerating icons within the home. And the suggestion that women brought their personal devotions from the household to the public sphere of the church can be supported by the evidence that women owned and appreciated icons that they kept in their own quarters. When St. Stephen the Younger was imprisoned after his arrest by the iconoclast Emperor Constantine V, he and his iconophile companions were comforted by the wife of the jailer, who brought out her own icons so that they could venerate the saints in the accustomed fashion.³¹ This act of bravery is appreciated, and under the nose of the jailer the icon venerators create a holy space in the prison, which is supposed to be restraining them from all iconophile activity, using the personal possessions of a pious woman.

This is only one of many stories probably concocted after the event to draw attention to the determination and courage of women in resisting iconoclasm, stories that are designed to condemn the heretical iconoclasts and praise the virtuous iconophiles. But their significance lies in the method used to sustain traditional practices in secret, as the female relations of Emperor Theophilos demonstrated in the 830s. While the Byzantine ruler branded icon painters and venerators with tattoos, which condemned them as iconophiles, his own wife Theodora took their five daughters to visit their grandmother Theoktiste and the emperor's stepmother Euphrosyne. The two older women maintained the practice of venerating icons and taught the emperor's children how to kiss and adore the proscribed paintings of holy figures.³² In this way, the women of the imperial family were active in passing on the established methods of venerating icons by secretly instructing the younger generation.

Such practices may well have contributed to the opposition manifested by women to official, imperial iconoclasm during the eighth and ninth centuries. As Peter Hatlie has recently emphasized, when St. Theodore of the Stoudios monastery praises all those true Orthodox who refused to comply with the iconoclast decrees, he singles out a few women, who resisted more successfully than men, and who supported male iconophiles by bringing them food and other necessities when they were in exile, fleeing from persecution, or actually in prison.³³ This confirmation of the role played by the wife of the jailer, mentioned earlier, amplifies the importance that icons had assumed in the personal devotions of earlier Christians. It suggests that particular women cherished rather than destroying their icons. By means of this private aspect, they maintained the continuity of icon veneration through periods of persecution and oppression, a role taken up by women more recently and sustained right up to the present day.

Another implication of such stories is that by the eighth century, the traditional household *lares* had been replaced by Christian icons. While it is impossible to document this slow process in the capital of the Byzantine Empire, the final outcome is revealed by an incident preserved in the *Life of Andrew the Fool*. Whether this collection of miracles performed by the “Fool for Christ” is to be dated to the seventh century or later, it provides striking evidence of the female care of icons and faith in them. The subject of one particular miracle was a devout woman (unnamed) who lived at Neorion, a region of Constantinople. Her husband frequented brothels and maintained a mistress, causing her great distress. On the advice of another woman, the wife sought the help of a magician, Vigrinos, who instructed her to prepare certain objects. He then came to her house and set them up in the woman’s icon corner (“*opou yperchon ai eikones tes gunaikos*”).³⁴ As the dreadful story develops, the icons then guide her to the truth—revealing that the magician is a demon. At first he appears to succeed in reforming the husband, but later in her dreams her icons turn to the west (away from the east) and she begins to feel turned the same way and so prays incorrectly. Then they become smeared with shit and emit a filthy stench. In great anxiety she appeals to Andrew, who instructs her to bring him the icons and explains the significance of the magic. Everything is restored to health, but we are not told if the husband reformed!

From this evidence, which is almost tangential to the story, we learn that this devout woman maintained an icon corner in her house, to which she admitted a magician when she was utterly desperate about her husband’s behavior. Recourse to magic is of course quite common, but in this account the magic has demonic origins, which are revealed through the woman’s dreams. Normally, she would pray to her icons, which were placed so that she faced toward the east, following normal church orientation. In this way, she reproduced in her own home a shrine in which she could make her own personal prayers. There is no indication that she was a wealthy woman, indeed most of the people helped by Andrew are poor inhabitants of Constantinople. So this evidence suggests that icon veneration as practiced in public churches was the same as that of the home, both in private chapels attached to wealthy households and in humbler homes where individuals established their own little shrines. While these areas may well represent the place of hearth and household gods of classical times, they also give birth to the icon corners of today.³⁵

The widespread nature of iconophile belief is found in many saints’ *Lives*, where mothers are recorded as praying to icons for their sons’

advancement in Christian faith and courage, for example, Theoktiste, mother of Theodore, who became abbot of the Stoudios monastery in Constantinople in the late eighth century. Although there is no mention of the arrangement of the Byzantine house, it seems reasonable to assume that such icons were placed in rooms occupied by their female patrons. They would naturally protect these areas as well as the women who lived in them. Later in the twelfth century the highly educated princess Anna Komnene, could suppose that the intense prayers offered by the mother of Constantine Psellos to an icon of the Theotokos helped him in his mastery of the curriculum.³⁶ She may also have known from Psellos's own testimony that his mother did not have enough education to assist him in his school work. But she prayed to the Virgin for her son's progress, and he rose to the very summit of the hierarchy of civil government in the empire.

Thus, in medieval Byzantium women regularly took charge of the domestic space and looked after the household icons, perhaps drawing attention to the saints on their name days by devoting special veneration to them.³⁷ Euphemia's faith in the protection of the archangel, depicted on the icon that she hung over her bed, also points to women as patrons of icon painting. This practice of commissioning an icon for a specific purpose becomes widespread in later centuries. It can be traced through the depiction of female patrons and donors within the image, a development that follows established traditions of male donor portraits. The results can, nonetheless, be striking, as Lucy-Anne Hunt has shown for a Syrian Orthodox icon now at the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai. This shows a woman wearing a long black veil kneeling before an image of St. Sergios, the military saint, who is mounted on his horse. Claspng his right foot, the donor who commissioned the painting begs the saint to protect her now that she is widowed and to care for the community of which she is a member.³⁸ While this icon was painted in the thirteenth century it reveals the growth of a pattern of female patronage of religious art, which goes back to the early Christian period. Through their devotions women develop close spiritual relations with their new male protectors, which they found particularly reassuring.

A similar concern is mirrored in the epigrams composed by Manuel Philes in honor of icons and works of art dedicated at the shrine of the Virgin *tes Peges*, near Constantinople, in the early fourteenth century. Several record the gratitude of women healed by the Theotokos: the wife of Syr Stephanos, who had suffered from an issue of blood; Irene, *archontissa*, cured of a severe headache; and an anonymous donor who offered a glass lamp in gratitude for her cure. Among these Kasiane Raoulaine, from a well-known family, felt sure that the Virgin had

assisted her difficult birth and saved the life of her baby son.³⁹ None of them went as far as the soldier Kallierges who commissioned an icon to record his healing by the Theotokos of his leprosy. But they may well have had their epigrams inscribed on the frames of the icons they patronized for the decoration of the shrine.

Clearly, one reason why many women dedicated so much attention to their household icons or icons in healing shrines must be related to their relative exclusion from the life of the church. Only as nuns, or in rare cases, deaconesses, could women perform a public role recognized by the official church hierarchy. A thoroughly patriarchal control prevented them from actively participating in the administration of the state religion and often criticized their zealous philanthropic activities, when these were considered inappropriate for women. Of course, there were particular rites and liturgies in which they participated—notably births, deaths, and commemorative services. And Sharon Gerstel has recently shown how these activities are related to the depiction of female saints in particular areas of churches.⁴⁰ So there were many occasions when women were expected to attend church services. But among the officials who ran the church there was no place for women: they had no formal career possibilities and were regularly reminded of the sin of the first mother, Eve, which they shared.

Given the thoroughly male domination of the organization of the church, female devotion to particular icons, whether these were publicly displayed in shrines and churches or private objects of cult set up within the household, is hardly surprising. In the case of icons inherited from mothers and grandmothers, or commissioned by female patrons, there was a customary duty to venerate and honor them. Icons of saints after whom individuals were named clearly gained special devotion on the shared name day. It seems quite possible that the protective Christian image was initially introduced as a replacement for the ancient household *lares*. What would be harder to demonstrate, though it may nonetheless be supposed, would be the adoption by the church authorities of the cult of icon veneration from its domestic setting within the household. Such a process would suggest that the official church might have wanted to take over an already popular activity in an attempt to bring it under priestly control.⁴¹

Within the home the family continued to venerate its images, without provoking any comment in the sources. Perhaps household cults of specific saints as well as the holy family was one of those features so widespread, so commonly accepted and practiced that no one thought it worthy of note?⁴² The maintenance of icon corners in family homes is certainly one of the most prominent traditions to have

survived in Orthodox lands into the twenty-first century, providing a firm base for personal devotion. It emphasises the domestic context of private worship, in which women establish their own holy space, make their prayers, and teach their children how to venerate icons. In this respect Orthodox women today sustain traditions of religious devotion, which are an integral part of the church, but which are equally preserved in the context of the icon corner of the home.

NOTES

1. Mieczysław Rodziewicz, *Les habitations romaines tardives d'Alexandrie à la lumière des fouilles polonaises à Kom el-Dikka* (Warsaw, 1984) 195–204; Christopher Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict* (Baltimore, 1997) 199, 201–2. **Update** Simon Ellis, *Roman Housing* (London, 2000), 3–4, 27, 158 on *lararia* often sited in kitchens; cf. Pedar Foss, “Watchful Lares: Roman Household Organization and the Rituals of Cooking and Eating,” in *Domestic Space in the Roman World: Pompeii and Beyond*, ed. A. Wallace-Hadrill and R. Laurence (Portsmouth, RI, 1977), 196–218; Luke Lavan, Lale Özgenel, and Alexander Sarantis, *Housing in Late Antiquity: From Palaces to Shops* (Leiden, 2007); Luke Lavan, Ellen Swift, and Toon Putzeys, *Objects in Context, Objects in Use: Material Spatiality in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, 2007), esp. 49–62, excellent bibliography on domestic space; Barbara Polci, “Some Aspects of the Transformation of the Roman *Domus* between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages,” in *Theory and Practice in Late Antique Archaeology*, ed. Luke Lavan and William Bowden (Leiden/Boston, 2003), 79–109.

2. Thomas F. Mathews gave a paper on these ancient portraits at the conference “Mother of God,” held in Athens, January 2001. The printed version by Thomas F. Mathews and Norman Muller, “Isis and Mary in Early Icons,” in *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, ed. M. Vassilaki (Aldershot, UK, 2004), concentrates specifically on the connection between Isis and Mary. Many of the images have been known for a long time, and were also excavated in the Fayum, but were never considered particularly significant.

3. Thomas F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*, rev. ed. (Princeton, 1999) 177–90, which constitute a new chapter titled “The Intimate Icon.”

4. *Ibid.* 180–81, pl. 139.

5. The account of Lycomedes, who commissioned a portrait of the Apostle John, preserves many of these features: the image was secretly painted, displayed in the owner’s bedroom, and honored with garlands and candles on an altar; see Montague R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament: Being the Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Apocalypses with Other Fragments and Narratives* (Oxford, 1924; rev. ed. by James K. Elliott, Oxford, 1993) “The Acts of John,” paras. 26–28, 313–14. **Update** Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, ca. 680–850: A History* (Cambridge, UK, 2011), 36–38, dismiss this and other instances of Christian images being decorated as pagan practices, thus taking on the anti-icon emphasis of the writers involved. They insist that veneration was reserved to Christian relics, not icons, until the late seventh century.

6. My attention was drawn to this sermon by a partial translation by Leslie MacCoull, *JÖB* 32 (1982) 407–14; repr. in her *Coptic Perspectives on Late Antiquity*, Variorum Collected Studies Series CS 398 (Aldershot, UK, 1993), XXII. It was published with a translation by E. A. Wallis Budge, *St. Michael the Archangel: Three*

Encomiums (London, 1894). This sermon has recently been studied by Lucy-Anne Hunt, "For the Salvation of a Woman's Soul: An Icon of St. Michael Described within a Medieval Coptic Context," in *Icon and Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium*, ed. A. Eastmond and L. James (Aldershot, UK, 2003), 205–32. While Euphemia begs her husband to make St. Michael her guardian for the rest of her life, the image becomes a strategy for her empowerment, and she is much stronger in her devotions because of it. Her husband, Aristarchus, wanted to ensure that she would be protected after his death by the icon they had commissioned.

7. *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, ed. and trans. Bernard P. Grenfell, Arthur S. Hunt, and H. Bell (London, 1925) XVI, 203–5, n. 1925.

8. Helen Saradi, "Privatization and Subdivision of Urban Properties in the Early Byzantine Centuries: Social and Cultural Implications," *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 25 (1998) 17–43; Geneviève Husson, "Houses at Syene in the Paternmouths Archive," *ibid.*, 27 (1990) 123–37; see also her study of late antique houses, *OIKIA: Le vocabulaire de la maison privée en Egypte d'après les papyri grecs* (Paris, 1983). **Update** On Late Antique and early Byzantine housing, see Martin Harrison, *Mountain and Plain: From the Lycian Coast to the Phrygian Plateau in the Late Roman and Early Byzantine Period*, ed. Wendy Young (Ann Arbor, 2001), and Gilbert Dagron and Olivier Callot, "Les bâtisseurs isauriens chez eux," in *Aetos, Studies in Honor of Cyril Mango*, ed. Igor Ševčenko and Irmgard Hutter (Leipzig/Stuttgart, 1998), 55–70; Klaus Rheidt, "Byzantinische Wohnhäuser des 11. bis 14. Jahrhunderts in Pergamon," *DOP* 44 (1990), 195–204.

9. See *La Vie de S. Syméon Stylite le Jeune (521–94)*, I, ed. Paul Van den Ven, *Subsidia hagiographica* 32 (Brussels, 1962) para. 118, 98, line 45.

10. *The Miracles of St. Artemios*, trans. Vincenzo Criscuolo and John Nesbitt (Leiden, 1997), no. 30; see also the many examples from the late Byzantine period collected by Nicolas Oikonomides in his fascinating article, "The Holy Icon as an Asset," *DOP* 45 (1991) 35–44; and in an earlier study, "The Contents of the Byzantine Household," *DOP* 44 (1990), 205–14, esp. 208.

11. Anna D. Kartsonis, "Protection against All Evil: Function, Use and Operation of Byzantine Historiated Phylacteries," *BF* 20 (1994), 73–102. **Update** See also Herrin, "Women and the Faith in Icons in Early Christianity," [chapter 3](#) in this volume.

12. Christine Angelidi, *Pulcheria: La castità nel potere (ca. 399–455)* (Milan, 1998); cf. Cyril Mango, "The Origins of the Blachernae Shrine at Constantinople," *Acta ad XIII Congressus Internationale Archaeologiae Christianae* (Vatican City/Split, 1998) II, 61–75. **Update** The catalogue of the exhibition and papers given at the associated conference, both edited by Maria Vassilaki, represent a major advance in the study of the cult of the Theotokos; see *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art* (Milan, 2000), and *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium* (Aldershot, UK, 2005). Bissera Pentcheva, "The Supernatural Protector of Constantinople: The Virgin and Her Icons in the Tradition of the Avar Siege," *BMGS* 26 (2002), 2–41; eadem, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park, PA, 2006).

13. Averil Cameron, "The Early Cult of the Virgin," in Vassilaki, ed., *Mother of God*, 3–15; Cyril Mango, "Constantinople as Theotokoupolis," in *ibid.*, 17–25; Vasiliki Limberis, *Divine Heiress: The Virgin Mary and Creation of Christian Constantinople* (London, 1994). **Update** See also Herrin, "The Imperial Feminine in Byzantium," [chapter 7](#) in this volume, and note 17 later.

14. Theodore Lector, *Historia ecclesiastica* (as excerpted by Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos), *PG*, 86, 165A; Robin Cormack, *Painting the Soul: Icons, Death Masks and Shrouds* (London, 1997), 44–59.

15. Sinai icon; André Grabar, "Remarques sur l'iconographie byzantine de la

Vierge,” *Cahiers Archéologiques* 26 (1977) 169–78. **Update** See now the catalogue entry by Robin Cormack in *Mother of God*, ed. Vassilaki, 262, which describes the icon as “presumably a devotional panel, particularly accessible for private veneration and prayer.”

16. Mango, *Art*, 34–35.

17. Michel van Esbroeck, “Le culte de la Vierge de Jérusalem à Constantinople aux 6e–7e siècles,” *REB* 46 (1988) 181–90. **Update** Bissera Pentcheva, *Icons and Power* (as earlier), shows that the cult of the Mother of God developed more slowly and that her icons were not carried in procession until the late tenth century, 50–54.

18. Marie-France Auzépy, “L’iconodoulie: défense de l’image ou de la dévotion à l’image?,” in *Nicée II: 787–1987 Douze siècles d’images religieuses*, ed. François Boespflug and Nicolas Lossky (Paris, 1987), 157–65, esp. 163; Charalambos Bakirtzis, *Agioi Demetriou Thaumata ...* (Thessalonike, 1997).

19. For a selection of the many miracles associated with particular icons, see Mango, *Art*, 133–40.

20. Judith Herrin, “Women and the Faith in Icons in Early Christianity,” [chapter 3](#) in this volume.

21. Mango, *Art*, 134–39 provides six examples of such stories cited at the council. In contrast, Auzépy, “L’iconodoulie,” emphasizes that the texts used to secure the support of previous iconoclasts all relate to the cult of the saints depicted on icons. The Council therefore spent less effort in justifying religious art than in strengthening the role of Christ, the Virgin, saints, and other holy people as intercessors. **Update** Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 274–76.

22. Judith Herrin, “Public and Private Forms of Religious Commitment among Byzantine Women,” [chapter 6](#) in this volume.

23. François Halkin, “La Vie de Sainte Elizabeth,” *AB* 91 (1973), 249–64; trans. Alice-Mary Talbot, ed., *Holy Women of Byzantium* (Washington, DC, 1998), 122–35.

24. Sharon E. J. Gerstel, “Painted Sources for Female Piety in Medieval Byzantium,” *DOP* 52 (1998), 89–111, esp. 96–98. **Update** See also Judith Herrin, “Unrivalled Influence: Mothers and Daughters in the Medieval Greek World,” [chapter 4](#) in this volume.

25. See the new edition by Marie-France Auzépy, *La Vie d’Etienne le Jeune par Etienne le diacre: introduction, édition et traduction*, Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs (Birmingham, 1997), and the translation in Alice-Mary Talbot, ed., *Byzantine Defenders of Images: Eight Saints’ Lives in English Translation* (Washington, DC, 1998).

26. *Digenis Akrites*, ed. and trans. John Mavrogordato (Oxford, 1956), 90–91, lines 1353–56. **Update** See now the edition by Elizabeth Jeffreys, *Digenes Akritis: The Grottaferrata and Escorial Versions* (Cambridge, UK, 1998), lines 275–80, 82–85; almost repeated later when Digenes spotted the young girl looking out and was instantly smitten, lines 349–59, 88–89.

27. Alice-Mary Talbot, “Women’s Space in Byzantine Monasteries,” *DOP* 52 (1998), 113–28, esp. 127. **Update** Alice-Mary Talbot, ed., *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints’ Lives in English Translation* (Washington, DC, 1996), *The Life of Elizabeth the Wonderworker*, trans. Valerie Karras, 122–35.

28. Christine Angelidi and Titos Papamastorakis, “The Veneration of the Virgin Hodegetria and the Hodegon Monastery,” in *Mother of God*, ed. Vassilaki (2000), 373–87.

29. Cormack, *Painting the Soul*, 88.

30. *Miracles of St. Artemios*, as earlier, nos. 10, 34, 174–83. **Update** Lighting lamps in front of icons is precisely the type of veneration open to uneducated people like this woman and the younger girl. While Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 57, deny that any intercession was expected, the act does suggest that

the holy portraits are indeed “transparent conduits to the divine that could be accessed by ordinary people.”

31. Auzépy, “L’iconodoulie,” para. 57, 159, lines 26–31.

32. Herrin, *Women in Purple*, 178–82.

33. Peter Hatlie, “Women of Discipline during the Second Iconoclasm,” *BZ* 89 (1996), 37–44. **Update** Idem, *The Monks and Monasteries of Constantinople ca. 350–850* (Cambridge, UK, 2007), 301, 306–8, 376, and the 18 nuns listed in App. 3, 476–82.

34. *The Life of Andrew the Fool*, II, 35, ed. and trans. Lynnnart Rydén, *Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia* 4, no. 2 (Uppsala, 1995), 170–85, lines 2461–62.

35. Laurie Kain Hart, *Time, Religion, and Social Experience in Rural Greece* (Lanham, MD, 1992), 116, 133, 150–51, 216–19, a brilliant study of the significance of icons in orthodox homes today.

36. *The Alexiad*, V, 8, ed. B. Leib (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1967), II, 34. **Update** See now the edition by Diether R. Reinsch and Athanasios Kambylis, *Annae Comnenae Alexias*, 2 vols. (Berlin/New York, 2001).

37. Hart, *Time, Religion, Social Experience*, 197–200: “Today, women bring their icons to the church on the relevant saint’s day and take images of the healing saints into the bedroom of the sick.”

38. Lucy-Anne Hunt, “A Woman’s Prayer to St. Sergios in Latin Syria: Interpreting a Thirteenth Century Icon at Mount Sinai,” *BMGS* 15 (1991), 96–145, esp. 113–24.

39. Alice-Mary Talbot, “Epigrams of Manuel Philes on the Theotokos tes Peges and Its Art,” *DOP* 48 (1994), 135–66, nos. 8, 9, 11, and 12.

40. Gerstel, “Painted Sources.”

41. As suggested by Thomas F. Mathews and Norman Muller in the article cited in note 2 earlier.

42. In his article, “Women at Home,” *DOP* 52 (1998), 1–18, Alexander P. Kazhdan tried “to demonstrate the lack of evidence that in everyday relations women were really oppressed by members of the other sex.” His reconsideration of patriarchy concludes that there was “no drastic difference between men and women in the household.” But his partial investigation of women in the home quite overlooked the possibility of women having responsibility for a part of the household’s devotional life in an icon corner.

MARRIAGE

A FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENT OF IMPERIAL STATECRAFT



In the context of a conference summoned to compare and contrast Byzantine and Ottoman imperial practice, I was not surprised to discover many shared features, including the use of marriages to reinforce foreign policy. Byzantine diplomacy had strengthened a Late Antique pattern, novel at the time, of committing princesses of Roman imperial dynasties to marriages with non-Roman military leaders of lower status. So by the time of Theophano in the tenth century there was a long tradition of such reinforcement of alliances, and I was curious to find out how this was handled and whether it was a practice shared by other imperial societies.

My attention was drawn to one particular text about a proposed marriage recorded by Patriarch Nikephoros, generally overlooked as a fantastic, possibly imaginary event. Why he (or his source) should have invented the account of Herakleios's meeting with the Tourkoi (Khazars) and their new alliance, sealed by the emperor's adoption of the Khazar leader as his son, is unclear. The gifts of insignia—crown, pearl earrings, and imperial garments—plus all the silverplate used in a banquet seem to be normal features of such diplomacy. The additional argument used by Herakleios to “make the agreement more binding” turns on the promise to marry his daughter Eudokia to the Khazar. This was achieved with the aid of a portrait of the young lady, which the emperor had brought with him (for just this purpose?). If the encounter is to be dated between 623 and 626, she would have been the perfect age (between twelve and fifteen). Even if the event never took place, all the elements conform well with established Byzantine practice.

Exploring the traditions of other empires, it seems clear that marriage to reinforce diplomatic treatises was widespread. In the case of non-Christian leaders, who could accumulate many wives, it helps to account for the collections of foreign women who ended up in courtly harems. In a distinct development, after using similar methods for several centuries, the Ottomans then switched to a different policy: they began choosing wives from among the slave population in order to avoid the complications of marriage alliances with outsiders whose powerful male relatives might always cause trouble. Nonetheless, the practice of diplomatic alliance plus marriage appears in numerous empires and in Byzantium it accounts for several very significant phases of foreign policy.

SINCE THE CHALLENGING AIM of the gathering held by the World History Association in Istanbul in 2010 was to compare the Byzantine and the Ottoman empires, I thought it would be appropriate to pursue the theme of marriage in imperial statecraft. Like many other features of

medieval organization, the Ottomans inherited and adapted a diplomatic system from Byzantium, which was then developed in the inner rooms of Topkapi, with fountains playing to protect state secrets. In his recent, highly stimulating book, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*, Edward Luttwak has demonstrated the significance of diplomacy in keeping the medieval empire alive, especially in periods of weakness and decline. But he barely investigates the serious part marriage could play in this process.¹ In this chapter I want to argue that marriage alliances became an essential part of Byzantium's foreign policy because they achieved something that no written diplomatic treaty could. Further, it seems clear that such arrangements are a common feature of imperial statecraft at many times in different societies.²

Luttwak relies on the very developed study of Byzantine diplomacy, quoting John Haldon, whose perceptive article "Blood and Ink" stresses that "Byzantine military and diplomatic priorities ... were seen as both universally better and morally superior."³ But when the ideology of diplomacy was weighed against the ideology of bloody warfare, the first, ink, incorporated and transformed the second, blood.⁴ Instead of this notion of the blood of soldiers shed on the battlefield, I would like to emphasize the blood of human relationships that united peoples, even though such unions were part of the ink of negotiated agreements. Through personal unity in marriage and the resulting offspring, Byzantium intended to unite the empire and its neighbors in a quite different and unique way. Marriage alliances were expected to sustain foreign relations, and often did.

In the fourth century St. Augustine understood this power and employed a metaphor of marriage in a telling fashion: "Your flesh is like your wife.... Love it, rebuke it; let it be formed into one bond of body and soul, one bond of married concord."⁵ He was drawing attention to the lasting concord that marriage might attain, even though he spurned that lifestyle. Marriage was indeed perceived as a particular form of union, the mixing of blood that united individuals. Of course, since marriages were negotiated they could always be undone, yet they played an important role in Byzantine diplomacy and foreign relations. This was in marked contrast to the practice in ancient Rome, where foreign princes were kept in the gilded cage of the imperial court but rarely allowed to marry Roman princesses. Of course, Byzantium continued this practice of taking hostages, which was a normal method of controlling unreliable allies. But the medieval Roman empire of the East developed additional ties which can be traced back to Late Antiquity.

Through the fourth century, as Constantinople grew into its role

and form as the New or Second Rome, both imperial courts sustained the Roman view that it was not proper to marry barbarians.⁶ An exception was made for non-Roman generals who had proved their worth and requested and obtained Roman brides.⁷ The sack of Rome by the Goths, however, brought another revolution in the wake of the unimaginable loss of the imperial capital: Galla Placidia, daughter of Theodosius I by his second wife, was carried off as a hostage and married to Athaulf, the Gothic leader. In 414 they celebrated their marriage in another grand Roman ceremony complete with nuptial hymns chanted by other Roman hostages. Their union produced a son, named Theodosius after his grandfather in a bid to create a new Gothic-Roman ruler. Traditionalists, relatives, and senators may have squirmed at this development, but Placidia seemed to manage. It is reported that both parents mourned the early death of their son. Shortly after, Athaulf died in a coup, and the widowed queen returned to Rome as part of a new treaty agreement.⁸ She was accompanied by her Gothic guard.

Even though it was made in exceptional circumstances, her marriage opened a new stage in Roman-barbarian marriages: by giving his son a name that emphasized his mother's imperial status, Athaulf indicated his intention to renew the Roman Empire through Gothic power.⁹ This created a precedent in the use of imperial princesses, close female relations of the Roman ruler, in political alliances usually designed to stop barbarian threats of conquest. In the following centuries the policy not only became a perfectly accepted and normal policy, it also created a distinctive practice of exogamy: the sending out (or sacrifice?) of imperial women for political ends. This always coexisted with the more familiar tradition of endogamy—marriage within the empire, among local (Roman) brides and grooms chosen for imperial children. Naturally, the partners were selected for the useful alliances, increased prestige, wealth, or local influence, which they brought to the union.¹⁰ We must remember that there were no love matches in those days.

After Galla Placidia's return she was married to Constantius, a suitably Roman candidate and an imperial pretender; they had two children and then he died.¹¹ Their son and daughter, however, represented the next generation of the dynasty of Theodosius, which her half-brother Emperor Honorius had failed to produce. After scandals, apparently inflamed by Placidia's Gothic retinue, who fought in the streets of Ravenna against regular Roman forces, in 422 she was exiled by Honorius to Constantinople. There she lived as an honored hostage in the court of her nephew, Theodosius II. But the situation changed again in less than a year when Honorius died (August 423) leaving a series of pretenders to the imperial title in the West among

generals and administrators. In order to put an end to their hopes, Placidia's son, Valentinian, then five years old, was declared Caesar (October 424) and they were sent back to Ravenna. This opens the quarter century of her domination of the Western court (though the general Aetius was the man in control, especially from 433).¹²

Theodosius II also strengthened the unity of the two courts in Constantinople and Ravenna and the superiority of the Eastern one, by betrothing his eldest daughter Licinia Eudoxia to Valentinian III. In November 437 this example of endogamy was celebrated in a sumptuous wedding in Constantinople at the same time as the publication of the Theodosian Code.¹³ Theodosius thus imposed a greater control over his young cousin. Placidia had little say in her son's marriage, but it is curious that she failed to marry her daughter Honoria, for whom she could have chosen any number of suitable husbands. Instead, Honoria grew up as an empress in her own palace in Ravenna and got involved in plots that resulted in her sending her ring to none other than the archenemy of Rome, Attila the Hun! While there are many stories behind this instance of female initiative (allegedly Honoria would have avoided one arranged marriage by trying to summon Attila into a different alliance), it seems clear that some unofficial approach was made to the Huns by one of her eunuch servants. Carrying her ring and a verbal message, which Attila interpreted as an appeal for help and the promise of a dowry of most of the Western Roman empire, some gist of Honoria's situation must have reached the Huns' encampment. Theodosius advised Valentinian III to give her to Attila, but he refused to contemplate such an outcome.¹⁴

Attila did not hurry to her aid, however. Instead of crossing the Alps to attack Italy, he turned north and west to ravage Gaul. It was there that Aetius defeated him at the Catalaunian Fields and he had to retire. And during the next year he died before he could realize the potential she promised.¹⁵ Perhaps Honoria had taken note of her mother's example and realized that it created new possibilities of exogamy—which might be presented as the civilizing mission of Roman aristocrats among barbarians—taming the wild, uncivilized tribal leader through exposure to a Roman marriage.

After her brief moment of notoriety Honoria disappears from the historical sources; no one was interested in recording her failure and eventual death. But during the reign of Valentinian III the potential of imperial daughters was not overlooked by the barbarians. The Vandal king Gaiseric of North Africa built on his victory of 442 by sending his son Huneric to live in the imperial court at Rome, and negotiated Huneric's betrothal to Valentinian's daughter Eudocia, a development characterized by Peter Heather as "a massive break with tradition."¹⁶

When Gaiseric received news of the murder of Valentinian III in March 455, his widow's forced remarriage to the usurper, Petronius Maximus, and Eudocia's marriage to his son, Palladius, the Vandal king decided to attack Rome.¹⁷ After two weeks of looting and taking prisoners in June 455, Empress Licinia Eudoxia and her two daughters went back to Africa, where the planned marriage was later celebrated. Like Athaulf, Gaiseric tried to use the union to enhance his own claims, which were resisted by the Eastern court. But this marriage strengthened the pattern of marrying Roman imperial women to non-Romans, going against the old taboo of barbarian marriage, which is the pattern I'm concerned with.

For many years historians have observed the growth of feminine dominance in the imperial courts of the fifth century: a "domestication of the emperorship" and "rule of empresses."¹⁸ In Constantinople this brought Pulcheria, the older sister of Theodosius II, into the limelight, as a prime mover in religious politics in the East. When her brother died after a hunting accident in 450, she took immediate advantage of the power vacuum. Since Theodosius's now widowed empress Eudokia was in exile in Jerusalem and their daughter Licinia Eudoxia (married to Valentinian III) was in Ravenna, Pulcheria seized the opportunity to elevate a military leader of her choice, the elderly general Marcian, to the purple. This recognition that the imperial blood of the Theodosian dynasty flowed in her veins, enabled her to decide on the succession. Marcian duly agreed to a marriage of convenience (since Pulcheria had vowed herself to chastity as a young woman) and became emperor. Her triumph was acknowledged one year later when her husband was acclaimed as a New Constantine and she a New Helena at the sixth session of the Council of Chalcedon.¹⁹

With Pulcheria's death in 453 the Eastern branch of the Theodosian dynasty died out, leaving only Valentinian III's heirs, who represented the dynasty in the West: Eudokia who had been married to Huneric, the Vandal prince, and her younger sister Placidia. In these circumstances, Gaiseric could indeed hope that his grandson would inherit Roman power, and Marcian appreciated the danger. He negotiated the return of Licinia Eudoxia and her younger daughter to Constantinople, where Placidia was married to Anicius Olybrius, another Roman refugee from the Vandal sack of 455.²⁰ On Marcian's death, however, the army imposed its own candidate for emperor, who took the name Leo. He recognized the claims to Theodosian descent in Placidia's family and in 472 sent her husband Olybrius back to the West to rule as emperor.²¹ But in the chaotic years that followed, a series of pretenders all failed to impose their rule, and in 476 Romulus Augustulus was removed forever by Odovacer. The Eastern emperors now became the sole focus of serious Roman power

and manipulated rulers, military leaders, and barbarians to their own ends.

Leo I was unfortunate in that both his son and his grandson, Leo II, whom he crowned in 473, died, leaving his widow Verina and his daughter Ariadne, who had been married to Zeno the Isaurian, to sustain the family. Zeno was proclaimed emperor but had to face challenges from Verina's brother and son-in-law, and after a turbulent period he died (491). Forty years after Pulcheria had shown how a female descendant could carry the authority of a dynasty, Ariadne followed her striking example. Most contemporaries realized that she personified imperial authority, as a daughter of Emperor Leo I and mother of the deceased boy emperor Leo II, and wanted her to pass it on by marrying another man who would thus become ruler. So the Senate of Constantinople invited her to select another ruler.²² Had she refused or just retired into a monastery, the Senate would have had to make the choice. Instead, she promoted Anastasius as Pulcheria had chosen Marcian.

Through the sixth century Constantinople preserved its imperial standing by judicious endogamy, coupled with the adoption of heirs. Thanks to the research of Ruth Macrides, we are now more aware of the significance of this spiritual link by which Justin adopted Justinian, who in turn nominated Justin II, who designated Tiberius, who promoted Maurice.²³ Adoption provided a method for emperors without male heirs to ensure the succession of their chosen candidates. It proved an efficient way of maintaining one family rule in spirit rather than flesh and blood. In a rude interruption Phokas, a semi-barbarian junior officer, fought his way to power from the Balkan border, where enemy activity increased dramatically. After a short bitter rule (602–10), he was overthrown in a military coup by Herakleios, a man of senatorial standing and Armenian extraction.

In the 610s, however, Herakleios faced a particularly serious military threat from Persia and also lost his first wife, who died after giving birth to two children. In desperation, he crowned his one-year-old daughter Ephiphaneia/Eudokia as empress and carried her picture with him when he campaigned. As he set out to conquer Persia, deep into Lazica and in critical circumstances he revived the practice of exogamy, during negotiations with the leader of a Turkic tribal group.²⁴ The military agreement resulted in a contingent of 6,000 Turkic archers participating in Herakleios's surprising attack on Persia from the north, which was brilliantly successful.²⁵

As Patriarch Nikephoros reports in his *Short History*, when Herakleios met with the leader of the Turks, he gave him the name of son, crowned him with his own crown, and showered him with gifts (all the utensils from a banquet, earrings adorned with pearls, and so

on). This clearly indicates an adoption, which brought the Turk into the imperial family.²⁶ Nikephoros continues: “With a view to making the agreement more binding, he showed him the portrait of his daughter Eudokia and said to him: ... ‘Behold, this is my daughter, the Roman Augusta (empress). If you espouse my cause and help me against my enemies, I shall give her to you in marriage.’ ”²⁷ After his triumphant campaign Herakleios kept his word and sent Eudokia off to marry the Turkish leader, but on learning that he had died, she was ordered to return.²⁸

Herakleios also had his daughter represented on the coinage, reflecting her status as Augusta and his dynastic ambitions.²⁹ She is one of the rare imperial princesses to be accorded this privilege, and she remained a great prize: later Patriarch Kyros of Alexandria recommended that she be offered in marriage to Ambros, phylarch of the Saracens, if he converted to Christianity.³⁰ But Herakleios would not agree. Once he had several sons who could carry on his dynasty he probably thought better of marrying Eudokia to a barbarian on the promise of conversion. His eldest son, Herakleios-Constantine, brother of Eudokia, had been betrothed to Gregoria, daughter of Niketas, his cousin in 610, and after the Persian campaign she was brought from Carthage to Constantinople and they were married, at the same time as Eudokia was sent off to marry the Turk.

In his plans for his daughter Eudokia, however, we see the origins of a policy that was to become very widespread in Byzantium: to secure a foreign military alliance by exogamy—through a marriage to unite the emperor’s daughter with his ally. This is the practice that gives rise to a myth, reported by Constantine VII in the *De administrando imperio*, that imperial princesses should never be allowed to marry barbarians, unless they come from the western regions of the empire (because Constantine himself came from those parts).³¹ As we shall see, the same emperor arranged several marriages between Byzantine princesses and non-Roman allies, so this was an entirely false claim. He also strengthened the imperial traditions of diplomacy that exploited Byzantium’s control of silk production, ivory carving, enamel, and goldwork so much appreciated in the medieval West.³² And despite his claims, tenth-century marriage alliances drew on this ancient practice of exogamy, which is neatly documented by Herakleios and his daughter Eudokia.

After 695 Herakleios’s great grandson, Justinian II, revived this policy when he was mutilated and banished to the Crimea. There he became aware of the Khazars, and plotted with their leader the khagan to regain his throne. The khagan gave him his sister (or possibly daughter) in marriage, and Justinian renamed her Theodora at her conversion and baptism into Christianity.³³ This new marriage

strategy was borne of extreme weakness and was undertaken to win back control of the capital. Once he had successfully captured Constantinople he sent for his wife and son to join him, and both were crowned and “reigned jointly with him.”³⁴ Justinian hoped, of course, that his son Tiberios would succeed him. But after a few years, a military general mounted a coup d’état against him and killed the young prince, who had been taken by his grandmother to the church of Blachernai. She placed protective phylacteries around his neck, gave him a cross to hold in one hand, and told him to hold on to the altar table with the other, while she remained outside the bema area (as women were not allowed to enter it). But her efforts were in vain, and Tiberios was murdered in order to put an end to the dynasty of Herakleios.³⁵

The Khazars remained a powerful northern neighbor of Byzantium, and in about 730 Leo III decided to use his young son Constantine to strengthen Khazar resistance to the Arabs, or at least to secure their neutrality.³⁶ An embassy to the Crimea brought the daughter of the Khazar ruler to Constantinople in a new alliance that played an important part in eighth-century history: an exogamous marriage without movement out of Byzantium. Čiček, renamed Irene (Peace) at her baptism, must have been a child bride (Constantine was only fourteen at the time of their betrothal in 732 and their first and only child, Leo, was not born until 750). This instance of exogamy for political reasons also has a distinct cultural influence—court dress. Čiček and her doubtless large entourage are said to have introduced a new style of dress to the Byzantine court, the *tzitzakion* or kaftan, which Constantine VII later identifies as Khazar dress brought to Byzantium at this time.³⁷

Every incoming foreign bride, and especially a young child like Čiček, was accompanied by her own servants, but she needed local advisers and court officials to help her to adjust to her new role as a Byzantine empress. In this case, Čiček/Irene was entirely successful in that she gave birth to a son who ruled as Leo IV, from 775–80 and was known as “the Khazar.” Her natal people remained allies of Byzantium, although they rejected the Christian mission of Constantine-Cyril and adopted Judaism. Fifty years later Theophilos sent engineers to assist in the building of a castle on the lower Don (Sarkel), and Khazar forces fought for his great grandson Leo VI against the Bulgars.

The obvious benefits of such an alliance were not lost on later Byzantine rulers. In the 760s Constantine V proposed a marriage between his eldest son, Leo the Khazar, and Gisela, daughter of the Frankish king Pippin. One of the ambassadors sent to Gentilly in 767 was a eunuch named Synesios, whose duty was to instruct the young

lady in Greek and Byzantine court life.³⁸ However, this marriage was later abandoned, and the emperor reverted to a policy of endogamy when he chose Irene from Athens as a wife for Leo. In her turn as empress Irene adopted a Western alliance; recognizing the growing power of Charlemagne in the late eighth century she suggested that he send his daughter Rotrud (Erythro in Greek) to marry her son. Once arrangements had been concluded, a court eunuch remained at Charles's court to teach Rotrud Greek.³⁹ But later the empress changed her mind, broke off the engagement, and adopted a policy of endogamy, which led to the search for local bride.⁴⁰ Whatever the truth behind the story recorded in the *Life of Philaretos*, Maria of Amnia was duly selected as the wife of Constantine VI, and her sisters and other contestants made advantageous marriages in Constantinople.⁴¹ Both Byzantine rulers therefore seem to have been aware of the different forms of political alliance that would result from marrying their sons to a Western Christian or a local bride, and favored first one and then the other.

In the tenth century Byzantium introduced momentous new developments with Bulgaria and Russia through exogamous policies. The Lekapenos coup of 919 was followed by Romanos I's decision to send his granddaughter Maria to Bulgaria, and to bring Bertha from Provence to marry his grandson Romanos II. Although Bertha was only a child and died before marriage, Maria's union with Peter of Bulgaria proved very successful.⁴² This emphasis on exogamy as a part of diplomatic alliances designed to strengthen the empire led to the dispatch of Theophano to the West and Anna to Russia.

Although Romanos I's alliance with the West had lapsed (when Bertha died), and Liutprand of Cremona's negotiations had failed, John Tzimiskes later found it expedient to renew good relations with the Ottonians. Knowing that Otto I wished to marry his son to a *porphyrogennetos* but not having children of his own, the emperor had to find a suitable bride and eventually decided to prepare his niece on his wife's side for the task. She was a young girl named Theophano. This marked a very significant development in East/West relations, sealed by the most magnificent marriage conducted by the pope in Rome in 972. Despite the fact that Byzantine sources do not mention Theophano by name, and she was not a born-in-the-purple princess, she performed an ambassadorial role and made quite an impact in the West.⁴³ She also tried to negotiate a Byzantine bride for her young son Otto III, but died before this could be arranged. In 1002, however, Basil II agreed to permit his niece Zoe, who was indeed a true *porphyrogennetos* princess, to fulfill this role. Had Otto III not died just as she arrived in Italy, their marriage would have united the two empires in a much closer alliance. But it was not to be, and Zoe

returned to Constantinople to marry three different husbands and adopt a fourth, thus providing Byzantium with emperors from 1028 to 1055.

Two years after Zoe's journey to the West, however, Byzantine relations with Venice were strengthened by another exogamous union between Maria Argyropoulaina and Giovanni, son of Pietro II Orseolo, the doge. The couple's arrival in Venice was feted as a foreign policy triumph, and Maria's import of the fork, the wearing of silks and jewelry (generally not available in the West), the use of eunuchs, the burning of sweet herbs to curb bad smells, and bathing in rainwater were perceived as part of the empire's civilizing mission. Such Byzantine customs were later denounced by Latin clerics as unnecessary refinements that had a corrupting influence on Western women.⁴⁴ In these condemnations we witness the other side of Byzantium's influence, hotly disputed and resented because the West had its own Christian traditions. Ecclesiastical authors like Peter Damian may have transposed their hostility to Orthodox church beliefs and practices onto individual Byzantine women as a way of repudiating all things Eastern. The fact that they could portray Theophano and Maria as wicked women, condemned to Hell, suggests that Byzantine women in the West may indeed have set new standards in dress and behavior, which other women wished to follow.

The empire's influence among the Rus' was greatly increased through another exogamous marriage, between Anna, who was a true *porphyrogenetos* princess, and Vladimir of Kiev. When Basil II was twenty-seven years old, in 985, he removed his uncle Basil from office and made a military alliance with Vladimir, conceding that his sister Anna would marry the ruler of Rus'. A Varangian troop of double-sided-axe-bearing warriors duly arrived and provided critical help in Basil's civil wars. As a result in 988 he had to send Anna off across the Black Sea and Vladimir adopted his wife's faith while his Kievan subjects were baptized en masse in the river Dnieper.⁴⁵ Anna sustained Byzantine and Orthodox influence in the North, and her daughter, aptly named Theophana after her grandmother, extended it yet further when she was married to the ruler of Novgorod.⁴⁶

Following this contact the Varangians became a fixed feature of Byzantine military resources, fighting as an imperial contingent throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and recruiting from as far afield as Anglo-Saxon England, after the Norman conquest of 1066, and Iceland and Greenland. The Scandinavian axe-bearers sailed across the North Sea into the Baltic and then south using the lakes and rivers of Russia, and finally across the Black Sea to anchor their ships off the walls of Constantinople. King Sigurd of Norway gave the golden dragon-head from his vessel to Emperor Alexios I, who placed

it in the church of St. Peter.⁴⁷ Varangian presence in Byzantium is also reflected in Runic inscriptions (on the balustrade and south gallery of Hagia Sophia) and on runic stones raised to commemorate members who died on campaign. They had their own churches in the capital, St. Olaf, dedicated to the Virgin (known as St. Mary Varangiotissa), and St. Thorlac.⁴⁸ Basil II's initial alliance with the Rus' thus had permanent results.

From the late tenth century onward, as Byzantium engaged with numerous new foreign powers, the pace of international contacts and alliances increased and became more complex. From Christian rulers in the west and north to Muslims in the southern and eastern Mediterranean and the incoming Seljuk Turks on its eastern borders, different forces entered the imperial diplomatic circle. All adopted the same emphasis on cooperation sealed by marriage, and such unions often played a major part in negotiations. Most Christians were reluctant to allow their female relatives to marry Muslims or Seljuks unless the sultans converted. And unlikely though this might seem now, the papacy and both the Byzantine emperor Manuel I and the German emperor Frederick I considered it possible and worked toward it.⁴⁹

Rulers of the Caucasian states, especially Georgia and Alania, were kept on good terms with Constantinople partly through a system of child hostages who acted as guarantees for the good behavior of their parents. In the mid-eleventh century Psellos comments on the presence at Constantine IX's court of a female royal hostage from Alania, who captured the emperor's attention and became his mistress after the death of Skleraina.⁵⁰ And shortly after, when Georgia was asked to provide a hostage, King Bagrat IV dispatched his three-year-old daughter to Constantinople "with his personal servants."⁵¹ This was Mart'a, known as Maria in Byzantium, and often identified as "of Alania," a sobriquet that derived from her mother Borena, an Alanian princess who became queen of Georgia.⁵²

After Theodora's death Mart'a was sent home, but she returned to Byzantium as the bride of Michael VII Doukas between 1066–71. At the same time her father sent a niece to marry the Seljuk sultan, demonstrating precisely the same type of foreign policy through marriage alliances that would most benefit Georgia. But Constantinople was clearly the more powerful center with which Bagrat IV wished to sustain good contacts. Under Michael VII, however, Byzantium was threatened in both the East and the West, which the emperor tried to curb through another exogamous marriage between his son Constantine and Olympias, the daughter of Robert Guiscard, the Norman ruler of southern Italy.⁵³ Maria survived the abdication of her husband and protected her son's rights by marrying

Nikephoros III. She secured the promotion of her brother Georgi II to the high rank of Caesar.⁵⁴ But when she realized that Nikephoros might set aside her son's claim on the throne, she sought the protection of Alexios Komnenos and betrothed Constantine to his daughter Anna.⁵⁵ After many intrigues she succeeded in retaining her imperial title and lived on in the Byzantine capital until at least 1103, running a literary salon and patronizing poets and writers.

Under Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118) and in the wake of the First Crusade Western influence in Byzantium increased and can be traced in styles of dress, hairstyles, particular games, and social habits. Such new fashions were encouraged by increasing intermarriage between Byzantines and Latins, which sometimes provoked criticism from Western theologians. In addition to the imperial court, Turkish, Hungarian, German, Aragonese, and French rulers all engaged in the manipulation of alliances through marriage, with Frederick Barbarossa receiving an offer for his daughter's hand from Seljuk Ikonion, while Manuel was married to two Western princesses and betrothed his son to the French king's daughter Agnes.⁵⁶ Western and Eastern families intermingled to such an extent that names are no longer any guide to an individual's birth.

After 1261, however, two new developments may be traced, as marriages with Mongols and Turks were tolerated in order to curb hostilities or ensure military cooperation. First, Michael VIII married his illegitimate daughters to the Mongol leaders Abaga and Nogai, in Tabriz and north of the Black Sea, and his son Andronikos II and grandson continued the practice.⁵⁷ In 1265 Michael VIII sent Maria to Persia, accompanied by high-ranking clerics and a silken tent woven with images of the saints. She actively promoted her Christian faith among the Mongols, commissioning the building of a church and its decoration by Byzantine artists from Constantinople.⁵⁸ After the death of her husband Maria returned to Constantinople; she gave her name to the church of St. Mary of the Mongols, patronized the monastic church of the Chora monastery, where she is shown as the nun Melania, and commissioned and wrote verses in honor of the Theotokos.⁵⁹ She not only maintained her faith among the Muslim and Buddhist beliefs of the Mongols, but also found a Gospel book that she brought back to Byzantium, had restored, and then presented to the Chora monastery.⁶⁰

In addition Michael VIII sent off the Laskarid sisters, daughters of Theodore II and sisters of John IV, to marry insignificant Western rulers so that there would be no claimants from the previous ruling family to rival his power. He displayed a ruthless determination to dispose of young women, forcing courtiers to divorce their partners in order to perform new marriages that suited him.⁶¹ This marriage

policy foreshadows the brutality that resulted in the blinding of John IV Batatzes, an act that provoked a patriarchal condemnation.

Second, in 1346 John Kantakouzenos negotiated a marriage between his daughter Theodora and Orhan, son of Sultan Osman. This united the later Byzantine emperor with the founder of the Ottoman Turkish ruling dynasty, the first time a Greek Orthodox ruler had permitted such a thing.⁶² It also symbolized an alliance with the infidel, previously avoided. Since Orhan already had several wives, this union of 1346 was designed to secure Turkish military assistance for Kantakouzenos. It was largely successful and remained in place until 1357. Christian rulers of Georgia and Trebizond had already negotiated such links with Muslim rulers who maintained several wives and concubines in harems. Theodora, however, managed to retain her Orthodox faith in Ottoman Bithynia and practiced Christian philanthropy in the imperial territory conquered by her husband. In 1359, when their son Halil was captured by Phokaian pirates, Orhan appealed to John V Palaiologos to help in ransoming him, and once this was successful Theodora persuaded Orhan to betroth him to Irene, the emperor's daughter (which was a marriage of first cousins). But the marriage didn't produce children who maintained the alliance. Theodora was the first but not the last Byzantine princess to marry a Muslim, nominally an enemy of the empire as well as unsuitable in terms of religion. But the decision of her father, John Kantakouzenos, reflects the ineluctable decline of Byzantium to the status of a client, dependent on the Ottoman Turks, that characterized the last century of imperial power.

Having shown how vital marriage alliances were to Byzantium's imperial power, let's recall some of the benefits. Such exogamous unions sent Byzantine princesses beyond the empire to influence foreign cultures, and brought foreigners into the empire to be acculturated. They also produced children who personified these new influences, for example, Boris and Romanos, sons of Maria and Peter of Bulgaria, and Otto III and his three sisters, children of Theophano and Otto II, or the perhaps legendary Boris and Gleb, patron saints of Russia, who are sometimes attributed to Anna and Vladimir, and their sister Theophana.⁶³ Knowledge of Georgian or Mongol authority, communicated to Constantinople through embassies that negotiated marriages, was confirmed by Maria/Melania's return. These princesses, whether Byzantine or foreign, embodied useful information on which the empire drew to strengthen its diplomacy.

For their part, while the Ottoman Turks accepted Christian princesses, they refused to send their own daughters to marry Christians. Instead, they used them to secure political alliances with other Muslim rulers, for example, Murad I married his daughter Nefise

Melek to a Karamanoglou; Bayezid I married Oruz to Ebubekir Mirza, grandson of Timur, and her sister Hundi to the Emir Sultan Bukari, a religious leader. After the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, when the Ottomans no longer had such powerful neighbors, their daughters could be married to loyal servants—sons of Ottoman officials, sons of slaves who had risen in imperial administration, and in the end to slaves, like those raised by the *devsirme*—very loyal converts to Islam who had no other family.

So the Ottomans inherited, or copied, or independently arrived at the same policy of using daughters and female relations to secure their own rule. Did other empires adopt the same style of personal alliances? A brief search suggests this was the case, for example, the Han dynasty of China practiced a policy of “pacification through marriage” with the Huns while they were still in the Far East (second and first centuries BC).⁶⁴ Later the Tang dynasty permitted the marriage of Chinese princesses to Tibetan and Uighur rulers to secure alliances, but this is characterized as “appeasement” and is not considered as important as trade.⁶⁵ It was a measure of success that in the early seventh century a Turkish leader could undertake negotiations to add both a Chinese and a Byzantine bride to his numerous wives.⁶⁶ Nonetheless the importance of marriage alliances is clear from the long list established by Pan Yihong in a fascinating article.⁶⁷ While the medieval empire of the Mughals in India was based on military expansion, this was also consolidated by marriage alliances.⁶⁸

By way of conclusion I would like to suggest that any great empire needs to create such relations to maintain its power. Marriage alliances appear to be a common feature of the foreign relations of other empires; the more familiar Russian and the Austro-Hungarian, which extend into living memory, and also the earlier medieval connections of the post-Roman world and the imperial state created by the Normans of Sicily.⁶⁹ When we consider how long Byzantium lasted, even if we count only from the emergence of the medieval empire in the seventh century, marriage alliances were one remarkably successful mechanism by which it sustained prestige, power, and influence in the international world.

NOTES

1. Edward Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge, MA/London, 2009), 137–44.

2. See for example, Régine le Jan, “Mariage et relations internationales: l’amitié en question?,” in *Le relazioni internazionali nell’Alto Medioevo*, Settimane di Studio ... LVIII (Spoleto, 2011), 189–224, esp. 190, 201, and 212–22 on the “performativité”

of diplomatic marriages.

3. John F. Haldon, "Blood and Ink: Some Observations on Byzantine Attitudes toward Warfare and Diplomacy," in *Byzantine Diplomacy*, ed. J. Shepard and S. Franklin (Aldershot, UK, 1992), 281–94, esp. 286–87. See also Telemachos Loungis, in *Byzantine Diplomacy: A Seminar* (Athens, 2007), 17–61.

4. His analysis of the symmetry between ink and blood is between the literate political culture/administration of war and the semiliterate elite of warlords and warriors. When the anonymous author of "On Skirmishing" wrote that conditions for this type of war no longer existed but they might recur, he showed awareness of literary traditions and the need for written documentation. He was a client of Phokas magnates' clan and was trying to define a new ideology and morality of warfare corresponding to the provincial magnates' ideas and frontier context. Cf. G. Dagron "Byzance et le modèle islamique au Xe siècle ...," *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* (Paris, 1983), 219–43. Had Phokas succeeded, Byzantine culture would have developed very differently. Blood and ink became symbolic or evocational reference points around which "two competing sets of cultural identities were focused."

5. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York/London, 1988), 426, quoting St. Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmos 140*, 16, *PL*, 36, cols. 1825–26.

6. H. Sivan, "Why Not Marry a Barbarian? Marital Frontiers in Late Antiquity (The Example of C. Th. 3.14.1)," in *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity*, ed. R. Mathisen and H. Sivan (Aldershot, UK, 1996), 136–45.

7. See the helpful survey in R. C. Blockley, "Roman-Barbarian Marriages in the Late Empire," *Florilegium* 4 (1982), 63–79.

8. Olympiodorus, figs. 24, 26, and 30, in R. C. Blockley, *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. II (Liverpool, 1983), 186–95; Peter Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History* (London, 2005), 191, 239–41. See most recently, Audrey Becker-Piriou, "De Galla Placidia à Amalasonthé, des femmes dans la diplomatie romano-barbare en Occident?," *Revue historique* 647, no. 3 (2008), 507–43, with appropriate stress on the strategy of exogamy.

9. In this respect I disagree with those who dismiss Galla Placidia's case as an issue of hostage taking, rather than a union that served a useful diplomatic purpose.

10. This type of marriage included imperial princes wedding the daughters of successful barbarian military leaders, as happened in the case of Galla Placidia's half-brothers, Honorius and Arcadius.

11. Olympiodorus, fig. 33, in Blockley, 196–97, who emphasizes Placidia's reluctance to remarry, "her frequent rejections of Constantius," and "her protests," which Honorius overcame by taking her hand and giving it to her husband.

12. Olympiodorus, fig. 43, in Blockley, 206–9; Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 258–60.

13. *Ibid.*, 129, 260; John F. Matthews, *Laying Down the Law: A Study of the Theodosian Code* (New Haven, CT/London, 2000), 4, 6–9.

14. Priscus, figs. 17, 20, 21, 22, in Blockley, 300–313; Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 335–36. Becker-Piriou, as earlier, 522–23, is justifiably skeptical of Giuseppe Zecchini's suggestion that Galla Placidia was behind the proposal; see "Attila in Italia" in *Attila Flagellum Dei? Convegno internazionale di studi storici sulla figura di Attila ... Studia Historica*, 129 (Rome, 1994), 92–107.

15. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 338–43.

16. *Ibid.*, 292–93; cf. Le Jan, as earlier, 214.

17. Priscus, fig. 30, in Blockley, as earlier, 330–32; Becker-Piriou, as earlier, 525–26.

18. See, for example, Kenneth Holm, *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial*

Dominion in Late Antiquity (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1982).

19. *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, trans. Richard Price and Michael Gaddis, 3 vols. (Liverpool, 2005), 2, 240, preceded by many additional acclamations of the rulers; cf. C. Angelidi, *Pulcheria: La castità al potere* (Milan, 1998); H. Chadwick, *East and West: The Making of a Rift in the Church* (Oxford, 2003), 34–49.

20. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 396.

21. Their daughter Juliana carried the dynastic torch further after her mother's death; she married Areobindus and they had a son Olybrius the Younger, who in turn married Irene, a niece of Emperor Anastasios I, *ODB*, 99.

22. F. K. Haarer, *Anastasios I: Politics and Empire in the Late Roman World* (Cambridge, UK, 2006), 1–5; L. James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium* (London, 2001), 19–20, notes the different sources on this event: Jordanes and Malalas refer to her choice; Zacharias of Melitene hints at their illicit relationship before marriage; Marcellinus ignores her completely as Anastasios is crowned.

23. Ruth Macrides, “Dynastic Marriages and Political Kinship,” *Byzantine Diplomacy*, ed. J. Shepard and S. Franklin (Aldershot, UK, 1992), 263–80, reminds us that lots of other types of kinship exist—baptismal sponsorship/spiritual ties, adoption, and so on. Marriage is privileged by historians of diplomacy (W. Ohnsorge, D. Claude, and the like), but ecclesiastical rites and gift giving, sealed by sworn oaths, could create links just as strong. Incoming foreign brides regularly changed their names, but so did Maria on going to Bulgaria, and again the name chosen for her was Peace (Eirene).

24. Constantine Zuckerman, “La petite Augusta et le Turc: Epiphanie-Eudocie sur les monnaies d'Héraclius,” *Revue numismatique*, 6e série, 150 (1995), 113–23, notes this instance of an exogamous union, 121; James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford, 2010), analyzes all the sources for the role of the Turks (also identified as Khazars) in the war with Persia—see for example, 114–15, 123–24, 136, 200—but does not mention the proposed marriage.

25. Walter E. Kaegi, *Heraclius Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge, UK, 2002) 143.

26. *Nikephoros*, ch. 12; Eng. trans., 55–56; cf. *Theopanes*, AM 61174, I, 316; trans. Mango and Scott, 447; Howard-Johnston, as earlier, 245, 255; Stephanos Kordoses, *Oi Tourkoï anamesa sten Kina kai to Byzantio (552–659 m. X)* (Bare Attikes, 2012), 204–6.

27. Many historians dismiss the story as “romantic,” yet both Byzantine authors had access to reliable sources, including the continuation of the Chronicle of John of Antioch; see Howard-Johnston as earlier.

28. *Nikephoros*, ch. 18; Eng. trans., 67.

29. Constantine Zuckerman, “La petite Augusta et le Turc” as earlier, 113–23; P. Speck “Epiphania et Martine sur les monnaies d'Héraclius,” *Revue numismatique*, 6e série, 152 (1997), 457–65; and Zuckerman's reply, *ibid.*, 473–78. She was crowned on 4 October 612, almost two months after the death of her mother, when she was about fifteen months old, *Theopanes*, AM 6104, Eng. trans., 430.

30. *Nikephoros*, ch. 23; Eng. trans., 73.

31. Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ed. and trans. Gy. Moravcsik and R.J.H. Jenkins, vol. I (Budapest 1949), ch. 13, 70–73; Peter Schreiner, “Die Kaiserliche Familie: Ideologie und Praxis in rahmen der internationalen Beziehungen in Byzanz,” in *Le relazioni internazionali nell'Alto Medioevo* (as earlier, note 2), 735–74, with a useful appendix, *Anhang*, of all the proposed marriages, classed as incoming or outgoing, but little sense of the different strategies behind each.

32. On the importance of gifts in international diplomacy, see Janet L. Nelson, “The Role of the Gift in Early Medieval Diplomatic Relations,” in *Le relazione*

internazionali nell'Alto Medioevo, as earlier, 225–48.

33. *Theopanes*, AM 6187, Eng. trans., 514–15; AM 6196, Eng. trans., 520.

34. *Theopanes*, AM 6196, 6197, and 6198, Eng. trans., 520–23.

35. *Theopanes*, AM 6203, Eng. trans., 529.

36. *Nikephoros*, 63, Eng. trans., 131; *Theopanes*, AM 6224, Eng. trans., 567.

37. DC, I, 17, 98–108.

38. Michael McCormick, “Textes, images et Iconoclasme dans le cadre des relations entre Byzance et l’Occident carolingien,” in *Testo e immagine nell’alto medioevo*, Settimana di Studio XLI (Spoleto, 1994), 95–162, esp. 128–29.

39. *Ibid.*, 134–37; *Theopanes*, AM 6274, Eng. trans., 628.

40. *Theopanes*, AM 6281, Eng. trans., 637–38. On the background to these negotiations, see J. Herrin, “Constantinople, Rome, and the Franks in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries,” in *Byzantine Diplomacy*, as earlier, 91–108 (reprinted in *Margins and Metropolis: Authority across the Byzantine Empire*); McCormick, as earlier.

41. *Vita Philareti*, ed. and trans. Lennart Rydén (Uppsala, 2002), 86–88, 90–92.

42. R. Macrides, “Dynastic Marriages and Political Kinship,” in *Byzantine Diplomacy*, 263–80; J. Shepard, “A Marriage Too Far? Maria Lekapena and Peter of Bulgaria,” in *The Empress Theophano: Byzantium and the West at the Turn of the First Millennium*, ed. A. Davids (Cambridge, UK, 1995), 121–49. On Bertha, see most recently, Günter Prinzing, “Emperor Constantine VII and Margrave Berengar II of Ivrea under Suspicion of Murder: Circumstantial Evidence of a Plot against King Hugh’s Children, Berta-Eudokia and Lothair (Lothar),” in *Centre and Periphery in the Age of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos*, ed. Niels Gaul (Oxford, 2012, forthcoming). I thank Professor Prinzing for allowing me to read his paper prior to its publication.

43. J. Herrin, “Theophano: Considerations on the Education of a Byzantine Princess,” [chapter 11](#) in this volume.

44. Peter Damian, *Institutio monialis*, *Opusculum* 50, *PL*, 145, col. 744; J. Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire* (London/Princeton, 2008), 203–11.

45. S. Franklin and J. Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus 750–1200* (London, 1996), 161–68; A. Poppe, “The Political Background to the Baptism of Rus’: Byzantine-Russian relations between 986–89,” *DOP* 30 (1976), 195–244.

46. A. Poppe, “Theophana von Novgorod,” in *Byzanz und das Abendland im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert*, ed. E. Konstantinou (Köln/Wien/Wiesbaden, 1997), 319–50.

47. Krijnie Ciggaar, *Western Travellers to Constantinople: The West and Byzantium, 962–1204: Cultural and Political Relations* (Leiden/New York/Cologne, 1996), frontispiece and 127.

48. *Ibid.*, 126–27 and ill. 3, 126, n. 71.

49. P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos 1143–80* (Cambridge, UK, 1993), 102–4.

50. Psellos, *Chronographia*, 6, 145–47, 151–56; Eng. trans., 231–32, 235–37.

51. Lynda Garland and Stephen Rapp, “Mary ‘of Alania’: Woman and Empress between Two Worlds,” in *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience 800–1200*, ed. Lynda Garland (Aldershot, UK, 2006), 91–124, esp. 98.

52. *Ibid.*, 100. Bagrat IV had himself been a child hostage in Byzantium before he became king (*ibid.*, 94, 98).

53. Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, bk. I, 10; Vera von Falkenhausen, “Olympias, eine normannische Prinzessin in Konstantinopel,” in *Bisanzio e l’Italia: Raccolta di studi in memoria di Agostino Pertusi* (Milan, 1982), 56–72.

54. “Mary ‘of Alania,’” as earlier, 106.

55. Constantine’s engagement to the young Norman princess Olympias, renamed Helena, was broken off, and her treatment by the Byzantine court was later cited by Guiscard as a justification for his invasion of the empire; see van Falkenhausen, as

earlier, 67–68.

56. Magdalino, *Manuel I Komnenos*, 99–101, cf. the efforts to marry Manuel's nieces to the rulers of Aragon, Montpellier, and Tuscany (ibid., 102); A. P. Kazhdan and Ann Wharton Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1985), 257–58.

57. Pachymeres, *Relations historiques*, bk. III, 3, 5, ed. A. Failler, with Fr. trans. by V. Laurent, 5 vols. (Paris, 1984–2000), II, 235, 243. For a curious reflection of Mongol influence in Byzantium, see N. K. Moutsopoulos, “Siniko ideogramma se toichographia tou Gerakiou,” *Byzantika* 18 (1998), 13–34 (clearly Chinese ideograms painted on the helmets of Mongol-Tartar warriors).

58. Antony Eastmond, “Diplomatic Gifts: Women and Art as Imperial Commodities in the Thirteenth Century,” in *Liquid and Multiple: Identities in the Thirteenth Century*, ed. D. Stathakopoulos and G. Saint-Guillain (Paris, 2012, forthcoming). My best thanks to the author for sharing his paper with me before its publication.

59. Paul A. Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 4 vols. (New York, 1966–75), IV; R. G. Ousterhout, *The Architecture of the Kariye Camii in Istanbul* (Washington, DC, 1987), 11–36, esp. 33; H. A. Klein and R. G. Ousterhout, *Restoring Byzantium: The Kariye Camii in Istanbul and the Byzantine Institute Restoration* (New York, 2004), esp. 5–14; N. Teteriatnikov, “The Place of the Nun Melania (the Lady of the Mongols) in the Deesis Program of the Inner Narthex of Chora, Constantinople,” *Cahiers archéologiques* 43 (1995), 163–80, with two annexes on the poem by Lee F. Sherry and Catherine Asdracha.

60. Georgi Krustev, “A Poem by Maria Comnene Palaiologina from Manuscript no. 177 of the Ivan Dujčev Centre for Slavo-Byzantine Studies,” *BS* 58 (1997), 71–77, records the survival of the very Gospel book mentioned in the poem, verse 28, and dates the composition to 1304–15, when Maria became the nun Melania, and made donations to the Virgin Chorine, that is, of Chora. This confirms that her patronage of the monastery predates that of Theodoros Metochites.

61. Pachymeres, *Relations historiques*, bk. III, 6, ed. Failler/Laurent, II, 243.

62. A.A.M. Bryer, “Greek Historians on the Turks: The Case of the First Byzantine-Ottoman Marriage,” in *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to R. W. Southern*, ed. R.H.C. Davis and J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (Oxford, 1981), 471–95, reprinted in Bryer, *Collected Studies II* (1988), no. IV.

63. The *tsaritsa* brought to Kiev “symbols of prestige and legitimacy beyond the sword”; Franklin and Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus*, 193. See also the likelihood that her daughter commissioned a Slavic Gospel Book in the Byzantine style; A. Poppe, “Theophana von Novgorod” (note 46 earlier).

64. Available at http://www.chinaculture.org/library/2008-02/07/content_23049.htm.

65. Available at <http://www.cic.sfu.ca/nacrp/articles/panyihong/panyihongtext.html>.

66. Zuckerman, “La petite Augusta et le Turc,” as in note 17 earlier. The Turks were also allied by marriage with the ruling Persian dynasty.

67. Available at <http://www.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/~asiamajor/pdf/1997/95.pdf>.

68. Available at http://india_resource.tripod.com/mughal.html.

69. See, for example, the Settimana di Studio at Spoleto (2011) dedicated to international relations in the early Middle Ages; note 32 earlier.

INDEX



- Aachen, [184](#), [198](#), [222](#)
Abelard, Peter, [268](#)
Aelfric, [182](#)
Aetios (eighth century eunuch), [200](#), [203](#)
Aetius (fifth century general), [305](#)
Agatha, [226](#), [248–49](#)
Agathias, [85](#), [97](#)
Agnes, empress, [232](#), [313](#)
Aikaterine, empress, [148](#), [233](#)
Alania, [86](#), [87](#), [123](#), [227](#), [230](#), [231](#), [312–13](#). *See also* [Maria/Marta of Georgia](#)
Alexander, emperor, [175](#)
Alexandria, [54](#), [116](#), [167](#), [221](#), [262](#), [282](#), [308](#)
Alexios I Komnenos, emperor, [3](#), [7](#), [231](#), [312](#), [313](#)
Alexios II Komnenos, emperor, [224](#), [232](#)
Alexios Komnenos (son of John II Komnenos), [175](#)
Alfarana, [22](#)
Anastasia (wife of Andronikos), [136](#)
Anastasia (wife of Julian), [165](#)
Anastasios I, emperor, [174](#), [195](#), [317n21](#)
Andrew, Saint, [23](#), [209](#)
Andronikos (silver merchant), [136](#)
Andronikos I Komnenos, emperor, [87](#), [232](#), [270](#)
Andronikos II Palaiologos, emperor, [314](#)
Anglo-Saxons, [182](#), [262](#), [312](#)
Anna (daughter of Leo VI), [241–2](#), [245](#)
Anna (mother of the Virgin Mary). *See* [Anne, Saint](#)
Anna (sister of Basil II, wife of Vladimir of Kiev), [8–9](#), [225](#), [227](#), [242–3](#), [250](#), [251](#), [253](#), [310](#), [311–12](#), [315](#)
Anna (wife of Alexios II Komnenos). *See* [Agnes](#)
Anna Dalassene (mother of Alexios I), [3](#), [5](#), [231–2](#), [258n39](#)
Anna Komnene (daughter of Alexios I), [xviii](#), [3](#), [86](#), [162](#), [232](#), [233](#), [248](#), [294](#), [313](#)
Anna/e of Savoy, [3](#), [5](#), [162](#), [204](#)
Anne, Saint, [103–5](#), [150](#), [289–90](#)
Anthousa, Saint, [26](#), [146](#), [244](#)
Antioch, [49](#), [116](#), [137](#), [232](#), [287](#)
Antonina, [99](#)
Antony, Saint, [138](#)
Aphrodite, [168](#), [217n17](#)
Arabia, daughter of Sophia, [165](#)

Arabs, [116](#), [123](#), [162](#), [185](#), [198](#), [228](#), [269](#), [284](#), [309](#)
 Arcadia, [165](#)
 Ariadne, empress, [2](#), [30](#), [165](#), [171](#), [174](#), [195](#), [307](#)
 Arianism, [49](#)
 Arius, [92](#)
 Armenia, [117](#), [120](#), [126](#), [307](#)
 Artemios, Saint, [17](#), [59](#), [74n30](#), [285](#), [292](#)
 Athaulf, [4](#), [304](#), [306](#)
 Athanasia, Saint, [143](#)
 Athena, [166](#)
 Athens, [11](#), [62](#), [194](#), [204](#), [261](#), [310](#)
 Atkinson, Clarissa, [88](#)
 Attila, [4–5](#), [305](#)
 Augustine, Saint, [263](#), [303](#)
 Auzépy, Marie-France, [84](#)

Bagrat IV, king of Georgia, [313](#)
 Balsamon, Theodore, [121](#), [123](#)
 Barber, Elizabeth Wayland, [96](#)
 Bardas, [214](#), [233](#)
 Bari, [22–23](#)
 Basil, *parakoimomenos* (son of Romanos I Lekapenos), [227–8](#), [229](#), [268](#)
 Basil I, emperor, [7](#), [175](#), [203](#), [213](#), [214–15](#)
 Basil II, emperor, [8](#), [225](#), [227](#), [228](#), [242–43](#), [246–47](#), [311–12](#)
basileus, [30](#), [200](#), [202](#), [203](#), [219](#), [241](#)
basilissa, [30](#), [167](#), [200](#), [219](#), [220](#), [231](#)
 Basil of Caesarea, Saint, [86](#), [102](#), [127](#), [136](#), [163](#)
 Basil Peteinos, [226](#)
 baths, [15](#), [87](#), [97](#), [101](#), [124](#), [126](#), [222](#), [226](#), [263](#)
 Beck, Hans-Georg, [263–64](#)
 Belisarios, [196](#)
 Belting, Hans, [172](#)
 Bertha (betrothed to Romanos II), [229](#), [242](#), [310–11](#)
 Bertha of Sulzbach (wife of Manuel I), [244](#)
 Biddick, Kathleen, [82–83](#)
 Blachernai, church of the Virgin. *See* [Constantinople: churches](#)
 Blachernai, palace, [224](#)
 Black Sea, [172](#), [275](#), [312](#), [314](#)
 Blandina, Christian martyr, [135](#)
Book of Ceremonies, [209](#), [210](#), [211](#), [244](#), [245](#), [246](#). *See also* [De Cerimoniis](#)
 Børresen, Kari, [xvi](#)
 Bosphorus, [214](#), [232](#)
 Bowles, Kim, [281](#)
 bride shows, [6](#), [8](#), [62](#), [87–88](#), [212](#), [213](#), [228](#), [241](#)
 Brown, Peter, [83](#)
 Bryene, [137](#)
 Bulgaria, [157n64](#), [165](#), [193n93](#), [210](#), [227](#), [229](#), [240](#), [242](#), [310](#), [315](#)
 burial, [23](#), [88](#), [41–44](#), [106](#), [144](#), [171](#), [208–16](#), [230](#), [233](#)
 Bynum, Caroline Walker, [82](#)

Caesarea, [102](#)
 canon law, [27](#), [115–28](#), [134](#), [136](#), [144](#), [200](#), [212](#)
 Cappadocia, [101](#), [102](#), [106](#)
 celibacy, [25–8](#), [80](#), [106](#), [120–23](#), [137–38](#), [212](#), [261](#); bishops and, [121–23](#), [148](#);
 dedicated virgins and, [26](#), [86](#), [102–3](#), [135–36](#), [140–42](#); eunuchs and, [17](#), [267](#);
 marriage and, [103](#), [121–23](#), [136](#), [142](#); of widows, [25](#), [142](#), [143–44](#)
 Chalcedon, Council of, [49](#), [117](#), [221](#), [306](#)
 Chalkoprateia, church of the Virgin. *See* [Constantinople: churches](#)
 Charlemagne, [78n57](#), [184](#), [200](#), [202](#), [203](#), [222](#), [243](#), [310](#)
 China, [5](#), [10](#), [184](#), [209](#), [268](#), [315](#)
 Chomatenos, Demetrios, [91](#), [265](#), [274](#)
 civil law, [19](#), [117](#), [118](#), [123](#), [128](#), [141](#), [147](#), [168](#), [200–203](#), [264–67](#), [268](#); female
 agency and, [13](#), [19–24](#), [29](#); women in legal records, [6](#), [13–14](#), [20–24](#), [141](#); women
 under, [xiv](#), [2](#), [3–4](#), [6](#), [19](#), [21–24](#), [27–28](#), [85](#), [141](#), [147](#), [180](#), [203](#), [230](#), [266](#). *See also*
 [canon law](#)
 Clark, Elizabeth, [xv](#), [12–13](#)
 Claudian, emperor, [81–2](#), [83](#)
 Code of Justinian, [6](#), [14](#), [117](#), [123](#)
 Constantine I, emperor, [2](#), [10](#), [47–48](#), [139](#), [161](#), [164–5](#), [167](#), [172](#), [174](#), [208–9](#), [215](#),
 [242](#)
 Constantine V, emperor, [7](#), [64](#), [176](#), [178](#), [180](#), [194](#), [197](#), [200](#), [201–3](#), [210–11](#), [213](#),
 [224](#), [240](#), [243–44](#), [268](#), [292](#), [309](#), [310](#)
 Constantine VI, emperor, [7](#), [62](#), [66](#), [87](#), [88](#), [89](#), [105](#), [147](#), [197–99](#), [201](#), [203–4](#), [208](#),
 [210](#), [211–12](#), [225](#), [227](#), [241](#), [243](#), [268](#), [310](#)
 Constantine VII, emperor, [86](#), [215](#), [226](#), [228](#), [229–30](#), [242–43](#), [244](#), [245](#), [247](#), [248](#),
 [250](#), [268](#), [308–9](#)
 Constantine VIII, emperor, [225](#), [227](#), [228](#), [240](#)
 Constantine IX, emperor, [87](#), [175](#), [227](#), [231](#), [313](#)
 Constantine Doukas, [86](#), [231–32](#), [313](#)
 Constantine Skleros, [250–51](#)
 Constantinople: Hippodrome of, [13](#), [14](#), [97](#), [99](#), [124](#), [232](#), [247](#); Milion monument,
 [164](#), [175](#)
 —churches: Blachernai, church of the Virgin, [63](#), [103](#), [138](#), [150](#), [170](#), [174](#), [178–9](#),
 [286–87](#), [290](#), [309](#); Chalkoprateia, church of the Virgin, [77n51](#), [170](#), [286](#), [287](#);
 Hagia Sophia, [3](#), [97](#), [172](#), [175](#), [178](#), [222](#), [312](#); Hodegetria, church of the Virgin,
 [169](#), [286](#), [287](#), [291](#); Holy Apostles, [208–9](#), [211](#), [215](#)
 —Great Palace, [161](#), [175](#), [177](#), [179](#), [184](#), [196](#), [199](#), [209](#), [219–33](#), [240](#), [247](#), [249](#),
 [250](#), [251](#); Bronze Gate of, [63](#), [66](#), [178](#); *Porphyra* chamber in, [8](#), [179–80](#), [223–25](#),
 [240](#)
 —monasteries: Chora, [314](#); Gasteria, [214](#)
 Constantius II, emperor, [167](#), [209](#)
 Constantius III, emperor, [4](#), [305](#)
 Corippus, [173](#)
 Cult of the Virgin. *See* [Virgin Mary](#)
 Cyprus, [106](#), [123](#)

 Dagron, Gilbert, [208](#)
 Damascus, [116](#), [198](#)
 Damian, Peter, [311](#)
 Damianos, patriarch of Alexandria, [54](#)
 da Voragine, Jacopo, [182](#)

De Cerimoniis, 210, 211, 214. See also *Book of Ceremonies*

Desert Fathers, 33n15, 102, 149

Desert Mothers, 38, 102

Digenes Akrites, 268, 270, 291

Dionysos, 124

Douglas, Mary, xvii

dowries, 4, 6, 17, 19–22, 27, 65, 86, 141, 143, 144, 148, 238, 267, 305

Durazzo, 171

Edict of Toleration, 65

Egon, Nicholas, 1

Egypt, 11, 42, 44, 50–51, 54, 82, 96, 102, 138, 150, 168, 262, 282–86, 292

Eleutherios, palace, 199

Elizabeth (Najran martyr), 145

Elizabeth of Herakleia, Saint, 103, 151, 289, 291

Elm, Susanna, 102

Elpidia, 95, 140

employment, women and, xvi, 15–17, 18, 85, 87, 92, 96–101, 140, 199, 222, 225–28

Ephesos, 29

Ephesos, Council of, 28, 53, 138, 169, 286

Epiphaneia-Eudokia, empress, 221, 302, 308–9

Eudocia. See *Eudokia*

Eudokia (betrothed to Romanos II). See *Bertha*

Eudokia (daughter of Valentinian III), 306, 307

Eudokia, empress (wife of Basil I), 175, 215

Eudokia, empress (wife of Constantine V), 176, 201, 244

Eudokia, empress (wife of Leo VI), 172

Eudokia, empress (wife of Theodosius II), 29, 51, 138, 165, 169, 220–21, 287, 306

Eudokia Dekapolitissa, empress (wife of Michael III), 231

Eudokia Hetairiotese, 16

Eudokia Makrembolitissa, empress, 162, 230

Eudoxia, empress, 165–66

Eufrasia, 182

Eugenia, 182

eunuchs, xvi, 3, 4, 5–6, 17, 25, 29, 30, 108n25, 177, 180–84, 194, 196, 198–200, 202, 221–31, 243, 244, 249, 262, 267–70, 305, 310, 311

Euphemia (mother of St. Elizabeth), 289

Euphemia (seventh century widow), 284, 295

Euphemia, empress, 165

Euphemia, Saint, 76n48, 273

Euphrosyne (mother of Holy Luke), 93–95, 105

Euphrosyne, empress (wife of Michael II), 8, 62, 104–5, 212–3, 214, 216, 233, 241, 293

Eusebius, 51, 209

Eustathios of Sebasteia, 124

Eustathios Romaïos, 13, 86–87

Euthymios, patriarch, 267

Eve, xvi, 28, 53, 91, 93, 150, 181

Fausta, [165](#)
 Febronia, Saint, [59](#), [121](#), [135](#), [137](#), [140](#), [141](#), [292](#)
 Franks, [198](#), [200](#), [222](#), [242](#), [310](#)

 Gaiseric, [306–7](#)
 Galatariotou, Catia, [93](#)
 Galla Placidia, [2](#), [4](#), [5](#), [171](#), [304](#), [305](#)
 Gangra, Council of, [124](#)
 Garland, Lynda, [221](#)
 Gastria monastery. *See* [Constantinople: monasteries](#)
 Gaul, [4](#), [305](#)
 Genesios, [228](#)
 Georgia, [2](#), [3](#), [312](#), [313](#), [314](#), [315](#)
 Germanos, patriarch, [73nn25](#) and [27](#), [77nn48](#) and [52](#), [178](#)
 Gerstel, Sharon, [296](#)
 Gibbon, Edward, [10](#), [162](#), [185](#)
 Glykeria, Saint, [150](#), [287](#), [289](#)
 Goody, Jack, [144](#)
 Gorgonia, [xv](#)
 Goths, [4–5](#), [100](#), [273](#), [304–5](#)
 Great Palace. *See* [Constantinople: Great Palace](#)
Greek Anthology, [85](#), [90](#), [97](#)
 Gregory I, pope, [40](#)
 Gregory of Nazianzos, Saint, [xv](#), [103](#)
 Gregory of Nyssa, Saint, [xv](#), [101](#)
 Grierson, Philip, [210](#)

 Hagia Sophia, church. *See* [Constantinople: churches](#)
 Haldon, John, [128](#), [303](#)
 Harvey, Susan Ashbrook, [80](#), [139](#)
 Hatlie, Peter, [xvii](#), [80](#), [92](#), [293](#)
 Heather, Peter, [306](#)
 Hedwig of Bavaria, [242](#), [244](#)
 Helena (mother of Constantine I), [2](#), [48](#), [139–40](#), [164–5](#), [172](#)
 Helena (niece of Empress Sophia), [165](#)
 Helena Kantakouzene, empress, [3](#)
 Helen/a Lekapene, empress (wife of Constantine VII), [86](#), [215](#), [229–30](#), [245](#), [247](#)
 Herakleia, [103](#), [287](#), [289](#), [291](#)
 Herakleios, [7](#), [176](#), [181](#), [195](#), [221](#), [240](#), [302](#), [307–9](#)
 Herlihy, David, [264](#)
 Hildegard of Bingen, [10](#)
 Hippodrome. *See* [Constantinople](#)
 Hodegetria, church of the Virgin. *See* [Constantinople: churches](#)
 Holy Apostles, Church of. *See* [Constantinople: churches](#)
 Homer, [5](#), [11](#), [81](#)
 Honoria, empress, [4–5](#), [305–6](#)
 Honorius, emperor, [81](#), [305](#)
 Huneric, [306](#), [307](#)
 Huns, [4–5](#), [305](#), [315](#)
 Hunt, Lucy-Anne, [295](#)

Hycinthus, 4–5

icons: characteristics of, 56–59, 282–83; development of the cult of, 40–41, 53–56, 284–89; early art and, 41–53, 66–68, 282–83; female agency and, 9, 15, 38–40, 61–66, 68–69, 104, 134, 145, 150–52, 163, 197–98, 281–82, 290–92, 294–97; the icon corner, 281–82, 292–97; personal nature of devotion to, 59–61, 150–52, 163, 198, 289–92; veneration of, 3, 8, 15, 26, 28, 38–41, 53–69, 89, 104–5, 120, 138, 151–52, 162–63, 173, 185–86, 197–98, 202, 204, 211, 252, 266

iconoclasm, xvii, 7, 15, 26, 38–41, 56, 61–64, 66, 68, 89, 104, 146, 151, 162–64, 194, 197–99, 202–4, 210–11, 213, 215, 291, 292–93; defeat of, xviii, 3, 7, 8, 38, 62, 163, 185, 194, 197, 199, 202, 204, 210, 211, 228, 243

India, 10, 316

Irene (daughter of Constantine VI), 212, 213

Irene (mother of author of *Life* of Theophano), 142–43

Irene, empress, xviii, 3, 7, 8, 29, 30, 62, 66–67, 88, 89, 162–3, 181, 185, 194–204, 208, 210–12, 213, 225, 230–31, 241, 243, 252, 268

Irene, empress (wife of John II Komnenos), 175

Irene Doukaina, empress (wife of Alexios I), 231, 232, 247

Irene of Chrysobalanton, Saint, 145, 146

Irene the Khazar, empress, 75n42, 180, 243, 309–10

Isaac I Komnenos, emperor, 148, 233

Isauria, 101, 211, 302

Isokrates, 182

Jerome, Saint, 51

Jerusalem, 2, 48, 51, 53, 101, 104, 116, 138, 139, 169, 197, 287, 292, 306

John I Tzimiskes, emperor, 225, 228, 238, 242, 250–51, 311

John II Komnenos, emperor, 175, 215

John IV Batatzes, emperor, 314

John V Palaiologos, emperor, 314

John Chrysostom/os, Saint, 91, 136, 165

John Kantakouzenos, emperor, 314–15

Johnson, Boris, 1–2, 10

John the Baptist, Saint, 54, 61, 125

John the Evangelist, Saint, 26, 42

Julian, emperor, 165

Justin I, emperor, 307

Justin II, emperor, 30, 37n55, 110n44, 168, 173, 195, 307

Justina, 137

Justinian I, emperor, 2, 6, 13, 14, 62, 98, 99, 117, 123, 140, 164, 165, 172, 182–83, 195, 196, 208–9, 215, 246, 307

Justinian II, emperor, 116, 165, 240, 309

Kale (mother of St. Thomaïs), 97, 100

Kale (sister of St. Luke of Steiris), 94, 146

Kastoria, 172

Kataskepenos, Nikolaos, 270–71

Kedrenos, George, 78–79n57, 89, 194

Kazhdan, Alexander, 115, 116, 221, 301n42

Kiev, 8–9, 172, 227, 242–43, 253, 311–12

Klapisch-Zuber, Christine, 264

Kollouthos, Saint, [285](#)
 Kraemer, Ross, [xvii](#)
 Kyrillos Phileotes, Saint, [270–71](#), [274](#)
 Kyros, patriarch of Alexandria, [221](#), [308](#)

 Laiou, Angeliki, [xiv](#), [264–65](#)
 Laodicea, Council of, [119](#), [120](#), [124](#), [136](#) law. See [canon law](#); [civil law](#)
 Lazaros, Saint, [149](#)
 Leo I, emperor, [138](#), [165](#), [170](#), [179](#), [287](#), [307](#)
 Leo II, emperor, [307](#)
 Leo III, emperor, [7](#), [8](#), [63](#), [75n42](#), [178](#), [179–80](#), [185](#), [197](#), [203](#), [210](#), [211](#), [213](#), [224](#), [240](#), [309](#)
 Leo III, pope, [200](#)
 Leo IV, emperor, [62](#), [66](#), [89](#), [194](#), [197](#), [198](#), [200–201](#), [210](#), [215](#), [224](#), [241](#), [268](#), [309–10](#)
 Leo V, emperor, [210–11](#), [212](#), [268](#)
 Leo VI, emperor, [87](#), [147](#), [172](#), [175](#), [176](#), [196](#), [214–15](#), [224](#), [227](#), [229](#), [241](#), [245](#), [248](#), [250](#), [274](#), [310](#)
 Leo Grammatikos, [211](#)
 Leo of Sinope, [200](#)
 Lesbos, [210](#)
 Licinia Eudoxia, empress, [305–7](#)
 Liutprand of Cremona, [9](#), [242](#), [250](#), [268](#), [311](#)
 Lucian, [100](#)
 Luke, Saint, [51](#), [138](#), [169](#), [209](#), [287](#)
 Luke of Steiris, Saint, [93–94](#), [103](#), [105](#), [146](#), [272](#)
 Luttwak, Edward, [303](#)
 Lyon, [135](#)

 Macrides, Ruth, [307](#)
 Macrina, Saint, [xv](#), [101–2](#), [103](#), [135](#), [141](#)
 Magdalino, Paul, [224](#), [265](#)
 Maguire, Henry, [172](#)
 Mango, Cyril, [xiv](#)
 Manuel I Komnenos, emperor, [175](#), [224](#), [244](#), [312](#), [313](#)
 Marcian, emperor, [165](#), [174](#), [221](#), [306–7](#)
 Maria (mother of Theodore of Sykeon), [95–96](#)
 Maria, empress (wife of Honorius), [81](#)
 Maria, empress (wife of Leo III), [178](#), [179](#)
 Maria Lekapene (wife of Peter of Bulgaria), [229](#), [240](#), [242](#), [310](#), [315](#)
 Maria/Marta of Georgia, empress, [2](#), [3](#), [86](#), [230](#), [231](#), [313](#)
 Maria/Melania, [314](#), [315](#)
 Maria of Amnia, empress, [6](#), [8](#), [87](#), [88](#), [105](#), [199](#), [208](#), [212](#), [227–28](#), [232–33](#), [241](#), [310](#)
 Maria Skleraina, [87](#), [227](#), [231](#), [250](#)
 Martha (mother of St. Symeon the Younger), [102](#)
 Martha (Persian martyr), [121](#), [141](#)
 Martha of Monemvasia, Saint, [26](#), [148](#)
 Martina, empress, [3](#), [181](#), [195](#), [221](#), [230](#), [247](#)
 Mathews, Tom, [39](#), [281](#), [282–83](#)

Mary (mother of Jesus). *See* [Virgin Mary](#)
 Mary Magdalene, [135](#), [140](#)
 Mary the Egyptian, Saint, [53](#), [138](#), [150](#), [168](#), [292](#)
 Mary the Younger, Saint, [149](#), [273](#)
 marriage, [16–21](#), [28](#), [62](#), [80](#), [84](#), [85–88](#), [121](#), [126](#), [135–36](#), [141–44](#), [174–75](#), [200–203](#), [225](#), [264–65](#), [266–67](#), [273–74](#); arranged, [8](#), [19–21](#), [25](#), [81](#), [85–87](#), [103](#), [105](#), [121](#), [140–41](#), [182](#), [183](#), [194](#), [212](#), [229](#), [231](#), [243](#); canon law regarding, [117](#), [121–23](#), [126–27](#), [148](#), [200–201](#); Christian monogamy, [2](#), [7](#), [27](#), [102](#), [174–75](#), [272](#); diplomatic, [9](#), [177](#), [200](#), [238–39](#), [242](#), [266](#), [302–16](#); dissolving of, [121–22](#), [148](#); refusal to marry, [xv](#), [82](#), [86](#), [102–3](#), [105](#), [121](#), [135–36](#), [141–43](#), [182](#), [197](#), [227](#), [272](#); remarriage, [18–19](#), [27](#), [82](#), [102](#), [117](#), [126](#), [133](#), [142–43](#), [197](#), [212](#); spiritual, [25](#), [27](#), [84](#), [103](#), [120–21](#), [136](#), [141](#), [142](#), [272](#), [275](#); widows and, [7](#), [27](#), [82](#), [102](#), [126](#), [142–44](#), [197](#), [272](#)
 Matrona, Saint, [102](#), [142](#)
 Melania (daughter of Michael VIII). *See* [Maria/Melania](#)
 Melania the Younger, [83](#), [136](#), [138](#), [142](#)
 Meletios, [49](#)
 Michael, Saint, [284](#)
 Michael I, emperor, [228](#), [268](#)
 Michael II emperor (of Amorion), [8](#), [62](#), [105](#), [212](#)
 Michael III, emperor, [66](#), [86](#), [213](#), [214–15](#), [231](#), [233](#), [248](#)
 Michael IV, emperor, [100](#), [147](#)
 Michael VII Doukas, emperor, [2](#), [231](#), [313](#)
 Michael VIII Palaiologos, emperor, [3](#), [106](#), [314](#)
 Mongols, [313–14](#), [320n57](#)
 Moschos, John, [18](#), [25](#)
 Moscow, [9](#)
 Mount Sinai, [3](#), [39](#), [54](#), [56](#), [57](#), [59](#), [170](#), [282](#), [287](#), [295](#)
 Muhammad, [162](#)
 Muller, Norman, [281](#)

 Najran, [103n24](#), [135](#), [145](#)
 Naples, [224](#)
 Narses, [196](#)
 Naupaktitissa nunnery, [145](#)
 Neilos of Rossano, Saint, [143](#), [146](#)
 Nelson, Janet, [133](#), [259n50](#), [184](#)
 Nicaea, [224](#)
 Nicaea, Council at, [62](#), [197](#), [199](#), [288](#)
 Nika riot, [183](#), [187n12](#)
 Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople, [221](#), [302](#), [308](#)
 Nikephoros I, emperor, [200](#), [202](#), [203](#), [210](#), [225](#), [228](#), [242](#), [250](#)
 Nikephoros II Phokas, emperor, [225](#), [227](#), [250](#)
 Nikephoros III Botaneiates, emperor, [231](#), [313](#)
 Niketas (author of *Life* of Philaretos), [89](#)
 Niketas (eunuch), [198–99](#), [200](#)
 Nirenberg, David, [262–63](#)
 Nisibis, [135](#), [137](#), [140](#)
Nomocanon, [117](#), [128](#)
 Nonna, [xv](#)

North Africa, [116](#), [196](#), [285](#), [306](#)
Novgorod, [9](#), [312](#)

Odoacer, [307](#)

Olga, [245–46](#)

Orpheus, [81](#)

Origen, [51](#)

Otto I, [238](#), [239](#), [242](#), [250–51](#), [253](#), [311](#)

Otto II, [85](#), [238–39](#), [251](#), [315](#)

Otto III, [250](#), [252](#), [253](#), [311](#), [315](#)

Ottoman Turks, [5](#), [106](#), [162](#), [172](#), [195](#), [262](#), [302–3](#), [314–15](#)

Ovid, [100](#)

Oxyrhynchus, [284](#)

Pachom, [50](#), [138](#)

Palestine, [42](#), [48](#)

Palladius, bishop, [102](#)

Palladius, son of Vandal king, [306](#)

Paphlagonia, [62](#), [88](#), [199](#), [228](#), [267](#)

Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai, [161](#), [164](#), [165](#)

Passover, [126](#)

Paul (bishop of Najran), [145](#)

Paul, Saint, [64](#), [91](#), [116](#), [120](#), [122](#), [135](#), [149](#), [247](#)

Paulinus of Nola, Saint, [136](#)

Paul of Monemvasia, [272](#)

Paul the *silentiarios*, [97](#)

Pelagia/Pelagius, [182](#), [184](#)

Perpetua (Christian martyr), [83](#), [134](#)

Persia, [5](#), [7](#), [43](#), [121](#), [135](#), [141](#), [196](#), [221](#), [308](#), [314](#)

Peter, Saint, [64](#), [312](#)

Peter of Bulgaria, [229](#), [240](#), [242](#), [310](#), [315](#)

Petronius Maximus, [306](#)

Philes, Manuel, [295](#)

Phokas, emperor, [203](#), [307](#)

Photios, patriarch, [112n68](#), [173](#)

Pikridios, John, [199](#)

Placidia, [307](#)

Platonia, [137](#)

Polycarp, [140](#)

Porphyra. *See* [Constantinople: Great Palace](#)

Prinkipo, [210](#), [211](#), [212](#), [213](#)

Proclus, [169](#), [286](#)

Procopius, [225](#), [269](#). *See also* [Prokopios](#)

Prokopios, [97](#), [99](#), [182–83](#). *See also* [Procopius](#)

prostitution, [xvi](#), [16](#), [27](#), [90](#), [91](#), [93](#), [97–98](#), [99](#), [115](#), [122](#), [127](#), [135](#), [140](#), [147](#), [263](#), [267](#), [268](#)

Protevangeliion of James, [103](#), [169](#)

Psellos, Michael, [89](#), [96](#), [147](#), [227](#), [231](#), [240](#), [294](#), [312](#)

Pulcheria, empress, [2](#), [29](#), [30](#), [165](#), [169–70](#), [171](#), [173](#), [174](#), [195](#), [220–21](#), [286–87](#), [306–7](#)

Ravenna, [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [171](#), [222](#), [305](#), [306](#); church of San Vitale, [222](#)
Roger II of Sicily, [144](#)
Romanos I Lekapenos, emperor, [215](#), [227](#), [229](#), [240](#), [242](#), [245](#), [267](#), [310](#), [311](#)
Romanos II, emperor, [86](#), [215](#), [225](#), [228](#), [230](#), [240](#), [242](#), [244](#), [246](#), [248](#), [250](#), [251](#),
[310](#)
Rome, [4](#), [7](#), [11](#), [49](#), [53](#), [104](#), [116](#), [122](#), [135](#), [167](#), [171](#), [174](#), [177](#), [195](#), [197](#), [202](#), [239](#),
[253](#), [287](#), [304–6](#), [311](#); church of Santa Maria Maggiore, [171](#)
Romulus Augustulus, emperor, [171](#), [307](#)
Rotrud, [241](#), [243](#), [310](#)
Runciman, Steven, [1](#), [10](#)
Russia, [8](#), [9](#), [11](#), [123](#), [242](#), [243](#), [245–46](#), [275](#), [281](#), [310](#), [312](#), [315](#), [316](#)

saints. *See individual names of saints*

Salome, [100](#)

Sappho, [81](#)

Serena, empress, [81](#), [135](#)

Shenute, [50](#)

Siberia, [42](#)

Sicily, [6](#), [144](#), [316](#)

Sigurd of Norway, [312](#)

Simon, Dieter, [264](#)

Sixtus III, pope, [171](#)

slavery, [xvi](#), [16–17](#), [21–22](#), [23](#), [27](#), [84](#), [99](#), [100](#), [122](#), [135](#), [144](#), [196](#), [227–28](#), [233](#),
[262](#), [265](#), [267](#), [273](#), [285](#), [303](#), [315](#)

Socrates/Sokrates, church historian, [165](#), [188n29](#)

Sophia, empress (daughter-in-law of Romanos I Lekapenos), [229](#), [245](#)

Sophia, empress (wife of Justin II), [29](#), [30](#), [37n55](#), [165](#), [173](#), [195](#), [231](#)

Sophia Palaiologina (wife of Tsar Ivan III), [9](#)

Sophia Phokas, [250](#), [251](#)

Sophronios, [292](#)

Sozomen (church historian), [165](#)

Sozopolis, [53–55](#)

St. Catherine (monastery in Sinai), [39](#), [54](#), [56–57](#), [59](#), [170](#), [282](#), [287](#), [295](#)

St. Sophia, Church of. *See* [Constantinople: Hagia Sophia](#)

Stavrakios (eunuch), [200](#), [202](#)

Stavrakios, emperor, [231](#)

Stephen, Saint, [170](#)

Stephen the Younger, Saint, [63–64](#), [103](#), [150](#), [174](#), [290–91](#), [292](#)

Stroumsa, Guy, [263](#)

Symeon Stylites, Saint, [49](#), [59](#), [270](#), [272](#), [287](#)

Symeon the Younger, Saint, [102](#), [285](#)

Synodikon of Orthodoxy, [63](#), [211](#), [213](#). *See also* [Triumph of Orthodoxy](#)

Tarasios, patriarch, [197](#)

Talbot, Alice-Mary, [291](#)

Thebes, [6](#), [145](#)

Thecla. *See* [Thekla](#)

Thekla (Christian martyr), [101–2](#), [135](#), [138](#), [148](#), [150](#)

Thekla, empress (daughter of Empress Theodora), [66](#), [179](#)

Theodolinda, [30](#)

Theodora (daughter of John Kantakouzenos), 314–15
 Theodora, empress (daughter of Constantine VIII), 3, 7, 185, 204, 227, 228–29, 231, 240, 250–51
 Theodora, empress (wife of Justinian), 2–3, 4, 13, 16, 29, 62, 99, 100, 140, 147, 162, 165, 182–84, 195, 209, 225
 Theodora, empress (wife of Justinian II), 165, 309
 Theodora, empress (wife of Romanos I), 245, 247
 Theodora, empress (wife of Theophilos), xviii, 3, 8, 29, 30–31, 62–63, 66, 86, 104–5, 162–63, 179, 181, 185, 204, 211, 213–14, 215, 216, 225, 226, 228, 230, 231, 233, 241, 247, 252, 293
 Theodora of Thessalonike, Saint, 26, 102, 272
 Theodora Synadene, 106
 Theodore (tutor of Constantine VII), 226
 Theodore II, emperor, 314
 Theodore Balsamon, 121, 123
 Theodore of the Stoudios, Saint, 27, 63, 87, 143, 266, 293, 294
 Theodore of Sykeon, Saint, 54–56, 95–96, 103, 140
 Theodore the Lector, 165
 Theodoretos of Kyrrhos, 101, 103
 Theodosius I, emperor, 4, 99, 100, 304, 305
 Theodosius II, emperor, 4–5, 51, 138, 174, 195, 220–21, 286, 287, 305, 306
 Theodote (daughter of St. Matrona), 142
 Theodote, empress (second wife of Constantine VI), 87, 211–12, 213, 227
 Theoktiste (mother of Empress Theodora), 104–5, 214, 228, 246, 293
 Theoktiste (mother of St. Theodore of the Stoudios), 32n2, 63, 294
 Theoktistos, 76n47, 202
 Theophana, 9, 312, 315
 Theophanes, 75n42, 103, 194, 201, 203, 269, 272
 Theophano (wife of Otto II, niece of John I Tzimiskes), xviii, 85, 238–40, 242, 250–53, 302, 310, 311, 315
 Theophano, empress (wife of Leo VI), 172, 241, 248, 274
 Theophano, empress (wife of Stavrakios), 231
 Theophano, empress-regent, 3, 147, 225, 227, 228–29, 230, 233, 242, 246–47, 250, 252
 Theophilos I, emperor, 8, 62–63, 86, 104–5, 211, 213–14, 225, 226, 227, 228, 241, 246, 248, 293, 310
Theotokos. See *Virgin Mary*
 Therasia, 136
 Thessalonike, 23, 26, 29, 99, 102, 172, 272, 287
 Thomaïs, Saint, 97, 100
 Tiberios (son of Justinian II), 309
 Tiberios/us II, emperor, 30, 231, 307
 Tiberios III, emperor, 147
 Torcello, 172
 Triumph of Orthodoxy, xviii, 8
 True Cross, 2, 48, 139, 164
 Trullo, Council in, 18, 93, 115–28, 134, 144–45
 Turtura, 53, 287
 Valentinian III, emperor, 4, 305, 306

Vandals, [306](#), [307](#)

Venice, [172](#), [311](#)

Verina, empress, [2](#), [138](#), [165](#), [170](#), [179](#), [286](#), [287](#), [307](#)

Virgil, [11](#)

Virgin Mary, [xvi](#), [26](#), [51](#), [53](#), [56](#), [57](#), [63](#), [82](#), [93](#), [103–6](#), [115](#), [127](#), [145](#), [164](#), [169](#), [170](#), [175](#), [179](#), [210](#), [281](#), [286–89](#), [292](#), [295](#), [314](#); Cult of the Virgin, [28–29](#), [53–54](#), [65](#), [68](#), [104](#), [138–39](#), [145](#), [150–51](#), [161](#), [164](#), [169–74](#), [178–80](#), [286–89](#)

Vladimir of Kiev, [8–9](#), [227](#), [242–43](#), [311](#), [312](#), [315](#)

Voltaire, [10](#)

Walzer, Michael, [262](#), [275](#)

Zeno, emperor, [165](#), [307](#)

Zoe Karbonopsina, empress-regent, [3](#), [87](#), [204](#), [224](#), [229](#), [230](#), [233](#), [241](#)

Zoe Porphyrogenita (daughter of Constantine VIII), [3](#), [7](#), [96](#), [150](#), [175](#), [185](#), [204](#), [227](#), [231](#), [240](#), [311](#)

Zoe Zaoutze, [227](#), [241](#)